



**TRAVELS WITH HARLEY IN SEARCH OF AMERICA**  
**MOTORCYCLES, WAR, DERACINATION, CONSUMER IDENTITY**

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*To James G. Bruen, Jr.*

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## **PREFACE**

Whenever I thought of the fact that I had lived in Europe for years before I had been west of the Susquehanna River, I couldn't escape the feeling that I was the American version of a Nestorian or an Arian because I had flagrantly denied two tenets of the American creed. I did not own a car, and I had never driven the car that I did not own to California.

The big western moment for Philadelphians of my generation took place 40 years ago during the summer of 1967. It was known as the summer of love, and whatever emotional attraction that hajj in a cramped VW beetle had was again associated with music, songs like "If you're going to San Francisco . . ." which prompted Philadelphians of a certain persuasion to head out in their VW beetles with the flower decal and the McCarthy bumper sticker.

So, 40 years too late and thousands of dollars short, Peter and I, representing the babyboomers who hadn't made our summer of love hajj then, made our pilgrimage, not in the cramped and narrow confines of a VW beetle, but with all of the luxury a brand new Class C motorhome can afford.

As we sat in the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the Conestoga wagon and watched America's landscape roll by at the stately Conestoga pace of 50 miles per hour (Peter is paid a lump sum for gas, and so the slower he goes the more money he earns), the main topic of discussion was what do you do when you have ruined your life. America has various answers to that question, and most of them have to do with the West, which is where you go when your past becomes too complicated.

The RV is a home on wheels for the permanently deracinated. It entered the canon of American literature 110 years after Hawthorne wrote the House of the Seven Gables, when John Steinbeck wrote *Travels with*

*Charley In Search of America*, the story of Steinbeck's 10,000 mile long RV trip from Maine to California and back again.

Steinbeck, his biographer tells us, "was afraid that fatherhood would interfere with his writing." It turns out that Steinbeck's fears were misplaced. Abortion, not fatherhood, destroyed him as a writer.

If the RV is the modern version of the Conestoga wagon, then the motorcycle is the modern equivalent of the horse. The biker is the modern day equivalent of the cowboy. The cowboys were veterans of the Civil War who never made it back home to the America that war destroyed. So, too, biker culture is a reaction to war. Cowboys were the disaffected veterans of the Civil War, bikers were the disaffected veterans of World War II and Vietnam, the boys who never made it back to the world those wars destroyed.

America never really felt comfortable with social engineering; as it became more repugnant in the average American's eyes, Hell's Angels took on the aura of outlaw heroes. Burdened by increasingly onerous social control, the average, which is to say, the clueless socially engineered citizen became increasingly fascinated by deviance, which he incorrectly saw as the antithesis of and antidote to social control. Eventually the dominant culture exploited this fascination as it developed even more sophisticated forms of control based on the arousal of sexual passion.

E. Michael Jones

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## **Chapter I: Wednesday, August 1**

It seems that there are two contenders for the RV capital of the world. One is Elkhart, Indiana, which is 15 miles east of where I live. The other is Forrest City, Iowa, 500 miles west, home of Winnebago Industries, the brand name, like Kleenex, that became synonymous with the recreational vehicle. RVs are simply a part of life when you live where I live. It's one of those things that you immediately recognize as some sort of culturally promoted fantasy and then forget about it while cruising along the Interstate trying to get where you've got to go. Your kids end up with RV toys because they end up playing with trucks. Someone you know buys an RV and then wonders why he did that and what he plans to do with the thing now that it has broken down for the thousandth time and is filling up his driveway.

Then suddenly it becomes an existential issue. During the summer of 2007 I needed to attend a wedding in Spokane, Washington. Flying was out of the question; driving was too expensive. It was during a weeks' long quandary that I thought of Peter. Peter is a man of many talents. He hosts a cable access talk show; he also delivers RVs. When I asked him if he were planning to deliver any RVs to the West coast at the beginning of August, he not only said he was but that I could go along for the ride.

What I found out later is that the RV was leaving not from Elkhart but from Iowa. In the end it was all the same, three days straight of somewhere between 600 and 700 miles a day over terrain that I had heard about but never seen (at least not at ground level) and had coalesced under the rubric of the mythic American West. In spite of having been born in America and having lived here all of my life, I had always felt a little bit like a Muslim who had never made the hajj to Mecca because I had never driven across the country.

Never mind that I hated cars. Never mind that my father did not own one until I was in high school growing up, and that my wife and I did not have one until our oldest son was in high school too. Never mind the fact that I had flown over the same terrain a number of times. I had this inchoate sense that America really was a creedal nation, and that the automobile and the West were parts of that creed. Whenever I thought of the fact that I had lived in Europe for years before I had been west of the Susquehanna River, I couldn't escape the feeling that I was the American version of a Nestorian or an Arian because I had flagrantly denied two tenets of the American creed. I did not own a car, and I had never driven the car that I did not own to California.

Growing up in Philadelphia, I came to this understanding of the American creed from cowboy shows on TV. One of the things that attracted me to cowboys back then was the fact that, more often than not, guys like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry were singing cowboys. Music goes a long way toward making people attractive in my book. I can even conceive of a TV show about artichoke pickers from Watsonville. As long as they were singing artichoke pickers, I'd consider giving them a second look or listen. Even the Lone Ranger stands out among movies whose names and plots I no longer remember because of his association with Rossini's *Wilhelm Tell* overture.

As far as I was concerned the mythic west began somewhere just on the other side of 69<sup>th</sup> Street, which was, and still is, the westernmost stop on the Frankford El. It was all terribly important, that stretch of

territory from Upper Darby to the Pacific Ocean, because it symbolized hope, even if no one could really explain why. The big western moment for Philadelphians of my generation took place 40 years ago during the summer of 1967. It was known as the summer of love, and whatever emotional attraction that hajj in a cramped VW beetle had was again associated with music, songs like "If you're going to San Francisco . . ." which prompted Philadelphians of a certain persuasion to head out in their VW beetles with the flower decal and the McCarthy bumper sticker. We were a whole generation with a new explanation, as the song put it. Eventually the summer of love turned into a miasma of drug overdose, venereal disease, and, worst of all, hippie commercialism. It eventually got so bad that the hippies held a funeral for the movement and abandoned San Francisco to the homosexuals.

So, 40 years too late and thousands of dollars short, Peter and I representing the babyboomers who hadn't made our summer of love hajj then, made our pilgrimage now, not in the cramped and narrow confines of a VW beetle, but with all of the luxury which a brand new Class C motorhome can afford. I didn't know Peter 40 years ago, so I don't know what we would have talked about then, but I am fairly sure that it would not have been what we talked about now, because 40 years represents the great hump of life, and we were now on the down side of that hump rushing downhill toward 60, just 10 years from the three score and 10 that God allots to man as his portion on this earth.

The West was still the West. It still embodied America's hope in the future. But if the West embodied America's vision of hope and the future unencumbered by the dead hand of the past, our conversation had a distinctly eastern cast to it. As we sat in the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the Conestoga wagon and watched America's landscape role by at the stately Conestoga pace of 50 miles per hour (Peter is paid a lump sum for gas, and so the slower he goes the more money he earns), the main topic of discussion was what do you do when you have ruined your life. America has various answers to that question, and most of them have to do with the West, which is where you go when your past becomes too complicated.

The traditional American answer to the question is move. In particular, move West. The American answer to the great American question has always been the same. What changes is the technology. In 1850, when Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*, the answer was still "move," but then the vehicle for moving was the railroad. The railroad allowed Clifford Pyncheon, scion of a New England family in terminal decline, to escape from his past. Or at least it gave him that illusion, because

looking from the window, they could see the world racing past them. At one moment, they were rattling through a solitude—the next a village had grown up around them—a few breaths more, and it had vanished, as if swallowed by an earthquake. The spires of meeting houses seemed set adrift from their foundations, the broad-based hills glided away. Everything was unfixed from its age-long rest, and moving at whirlwind speed opposite to their own. (Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967, p. 256)

Clifford and Hepzibah Pyncheon were escaping from the house of the seven gables because that house, acquired by ancestral acts of theft and murder, had become the locus of sin, history, and the dead hand of the past over their lives. Their lives were ruled by a curse—quite literally, Maule's curse—and when they realized that they were powerless to lift this curse from their blighted lives, they had recourse to the remedy which millions of Americans would seek in years to come: they left. They pulled up stakes; they moved. Moving always involves technology of one sort or another, and in 1850 the state of the art technology for moving was the railroad. Hawthorne was writing in an age when his peers drew metaphysical lessons from physical improvements. One of the great essays of his day was on the moral influence of steam, and so it comes as no surprise that Clifford got swept up into the same delusion, namely, that the railroad was going to solve his spiritual problems. The logic behind the escape plan goes roughly as follows: If a man is no longer bound to one place, then sin will have no hold over him, because sin always happens in a particular place and time. Since one of the great sins in history (in particular the history of the English speaking world) is theft of land and real estate, the railroad will abolish this sin by abolishing the home:

"This admirable invention of the railroad," Clifford tells the train's puzzled conductor, who feels that "The best chance of pleasure in an easterly rain. . . is in a man's own house with a nice little fire in the chimney," "can abolish history and all the misery bound up with it by turning men back into nomads." The railroad, Clifford continues, "with its vast and inevitable improvements to be looked for, both as to speed and convenience, is destined to do away with those stale ideas of home and fireside and substitute something better. . . . My impression is that our wonderfully increased and still increasing facilities of locomotion are destined to bring us round again to the nomadic state. . . ."

Railroads give us the ability to leave the past behind us. Since Americans are invariably people who have left some other place to come here, this prospect corresponds to the selection process that created America and is, therefore, doubly attractive. Railroads "are positively the greatest blessing that the ages have wrought for us. They give us wings; they annihilate the toil and dust of pilgrimage; they spiritualize travel. Transition being so facile, what can be any man's inducement to tarry in one spot? Why, therefore,

should he build a more cumbrous habitation than can readily be carried off with him?"

Had Hawthorne been able to see 150 years into the future and contemplate the Class A motorhomes that were coverging, like our Class C motorhome, on Redmond, Oregon, he would have most probably been amazed at just how cumbrous a habitation Americans would eventually be able to carry off with them. But the psychological motivation behind moving—whether by railroad or RV—would have been no more a mystery to him now than it was to him then.

"Why," Clifford continues, "should he make himself a prisoner for life in brick and stone and old worn eaten timber, when he may just as easily dwell, in one sense, nowhere—in a better sense, wherever the fit and beautiful shall offer him a home?"

"I should scarcely call it an improved state of things," the conductor replied, "to live everywhere and nowhere!"

But Clifford is just getting started. The possibilities of railroad travel as the solution to his problems have intoxicated him and loosened his tongue accordingly:

Morbid influences, in a thousand-fold variety, gather about hearths, and pollute the life of households. There is no such unwholesome atmosphere as that of an old home, rendered poisonous by one's defunct forefathers and relatives! I speak of what I know. . . . rusty, crazy, creaky, dry-rotted, damp-rotted, dingy, dark and miserable old dungeon with an arched window over the porch and a little shop door on one side, and a great melancholy elm before it. Now, sir, whenever my thoughts recur to this seven-gabled mansion . . . I have a vision of an elderly man . . . dead, stone dead, with an ugly flow of blood upon his shirt bosom. . . . I could never flourish there, nor be happy nor do nor enjoy what God meant me to do and enjoy! . . . it were a relief to me if that house could be torn down . . . . For, Sir, the farther I get away from it, the more does the joy, the lightsome freshness, the heart-leap, the intellectual dance, the youth, in short—yes, my youth, my youth—the more does it come back to me. No longer ago than this morning was I old . . . But now do I look old? If so, my aspect belies me strangely, for—a great weight being off my mind—I feel in the very hey-day of my youth, with the world and my best days before me.

Abolish real estate and you will abolish sin! Victims of the subprime bust might agree. Clifford is both loquacious and prophetic in a way he fails to understand:

What we call real estate—the solid ground to build a house on—is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests. A man will commit almost any wrong . . . only to build a great, gloomy, dark-chambered mansion for himself to die in and for his posterity to be miserable in. . . . Within the lifetime of the child already born . . . All this will be done away. The world is growing too ethereal and spiritual to bear these enormities a great while longer. . . . the harbingers of a better era are unmistakable.

Hawthorne, of course, viewed this sort of pretension with an irony that was as rare in his own day as it is in our own. After the trauma of the Civil War—only ten years over the horizon at the time Hawthorne wrote his book—America would become coarsened, and after that happened its inclination to find technological solutions for moral and spiritual problems only intensified. The technology increased in power and scope as well, until 157 years later when Walt Whitman's dictum "Every man his own priest" had changed into "Every man his own railroad," largely because of the introduction of the Interstate and the RV. The only thing that didn't change was the motivation to get moving in the first place, which remained moral and spiritual, as is the case when a man "feels to be over-filled with the dead man's presence" and flees "Heaven knows whither, at the speed of a hurricane, by railroad" or Class C Motorhome (Hawthorne, p. 265).

Both Peter and I were getting close to Clifford Pyncheon in age (if in fact we hadn't superceded him), but somehow Hawthorne's irony had spoiled the Great American Escape for us. Peter started out in life as the scion of German and Norwegian immigrants who had settled in the Wisconsin Dells. Peter's father graduated from Notre Dame in '43, trained as Navy pilot, but the war ended before he could be deployed. Attending Notre Dame created in his mind the standard image of God, country, and Notre Dame which that generation had carried away with it. What Peter's father never learned is that nothing stays the same in this life, and that the only definitive explanation of life in America after World War II was *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. And so it was ordained early on that Peter was to attend Notre Dame, as his father had, without anyone telling Peter that the pod people had taken over what still called itself a Catholic university in the years following his father's graduation.

One year before he entered Notre Dame, Peter went to visit his sister, who was attending St. Mary's College across the street at the time. It was Mardi Gras 1970. Peter was a naïve high school senior student athlete who believed in the culture which the Wisconsin Dells had bequeathed him, and so was not prepared for what the Notre Dame students told him when he arrived to stay for the weekend in their dorm room. The testimony of the students was unanimous. "This place will really fuck you up." The students told Peter. "We're all fucked up and we don't know why."

Peter returned to Wisconsin convinced that he should not go to Notre Dame, but his uncle convinced him otherwise. Like Ishmael in *Moby Dick*, Peter ignored the *mene tekel* of his peers, and as a result Peter's life took a turn for the worse when he arrived at the University of Notre Dame in 1970.

After three years of deliberately instigated intellectual confusion, Peter couldn't take it anymore. He returned to Wisconsin and moved into the family cabin along the Wisconsin River and started reading Nietzsche, the only author he had picked up from his stay at Notre Dame. One night he took speed and stayed up all night trying to figure things out. When the sun came up the next morning, the only phrase left in his mind was "the name of Jesus." Peter then dropped out of Notre Dame; he had dropped out of the Catholic faith shortly after he arrived in South Bend.

He asked his father to let him stay in their hunting lodge, and his father agreed to let him stay on one condition: that he go to a psychiatrist, which in this instance meant going to Dr. Hahn, the famous Jewish psychiatrist from Poland, who let him rattle on at \$50 an hour until one day Peter mentioned that he had been thinking about God. At that point Dr. Hahn said, "Peter, you are having a fantasy, and I fear you are entering into psychosis." He then threatened to put him on medication and into a mental hospital if he continued to talk about God.

### **Boo merdaemmerung**

Peter, as I mentioned, threw out the Catholic baby with the Notre Dame bath water. Peter eventually got his degree. He now considers himself an itinerant preacher in the Protestant mode, who travels around the country and pays his bills by delivering RVs. The big issue in Peter's life right now is getting his Commercial Drivers License. Given his state in life, getting a CDL makes perfect sense. He will be able to deliver the whole gamut of RVs now and make more money. But the CDL has taken on a metaphysical meaning in the Wisconsin Dells. If he gets it, that means that Peter has finally made something out of his life. It means that Peter is no longer a 55-year-old loser. He is now a 55-year-old who has been certified by the state to drive big rigs. Peter's father, in whose heart hope springs eternal, stops people on the street in the Wisconsin Dells to announce that Peter is on the verge of getting his CDL. It may even make the papers there since it is the first time he has gotten a degree in his entire life. Shortly after our odyssey ended, Peter called to say that he had gotten his CDL, so with this achievement under his belt he can hold his head high in the Dells now. Regret should be the farthest thing from his mind, and yet . . . Perhaps it's the times; perhaps it's the mores. *O tempora! O mores!* Perhaps it's a bad case of Boomerdaemmerung. Whatever, but now Peter wonders whether he should have gone to the seminary when he was 13 years old, which was his original plan in life. More than once he mentioned the attractions of the monastic life. I make a note to mention Peter when I visit the monastery in Norway.

Or maybe regret is the new demographic issue for the baby boomer generation, which is now pushing 60. "Regrets I've had a few," is how Frank Sinatra put it when he sang "My Way," but this generation never liked Frank Sinatra, and so it's understandable that they might have a different attitude toward regret.

While speaking in Maine, I ran into another babyboomer, one year older than me, someone whom I hadn't seen in years, someone who had gotten me a speaking engagement there in the early '90s. When I asked "How are you doing?" my question elicited the sad story that this man's wife had left him for another man and ruined his life. James was 61 years old at the time and still interested in meeting other women, even though the affair he had had with the divorcee of a year ago hadn't gone particularly well. All of this sexual trauma had forced James to brood on the past, in particular on a trip he had made to California 40 years earlier. On that trip he had met a woman, had entered into a sexual relationship with her (as many had then), and then left her to come back to something or other on the East Coast and had forgotten her pretty much until his wife left him. Now James is full of regret. "I should have married her," is how he put it to me on that foggy evening in Maine, putting me in the position of trying to offer some consolation. "I can't un-mess up your life for you," is what I blurted out at the time. It wasn't the most consoling thing to say, I suppose. It also wasn't the only thing I said. But in many ways, it was the most pertinent thing to say to someone who was contemplating another sexual relationship to make up for the failures of the past. I spoke of redemption too, but it became clear as I spoke, that redemption is not a time machine. We can still make contact with God's plan for us as long as we are alive, but we can never go back and marry the woman we didn't marry, or bring back to life the children we killed.

James was fortunate enough to have three children by the woman who left him for another man. One of the biggest sources of regret for the baby boomer generation is the sexual revolution. The sexual revolution blinded them to the people they were supposed to marry. But worse than that, it seduced them into killing their own children. If there is one thing that can ruin a life, it is abortion. Abortion devastates the lives of everyone involved in it.

Peter, who now feels he should have joined the seminary when he was 13 years old, lives like a monk, and in fact talks with enthusiasm about the monasteries of the middle ages, so abortion is not part of his story. But it is part of Daniel Smith's story, which is now in print ("How Did I Get So Far from Who I Am?" By Daniel Smith, in Kevin Burke LSW, David Wemhoff, Marvin Stockwell, eds, *Redeeming a Father's Heart: Men Share Powerful Stories of Abortion Loss and Recovery* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2007, p. 51).

Like Peter, Daniel Smith went to Notre Dame. Unlike Peter, Daniel Smith went on to a fairly successful career as a lawyer. Daniel never heard the *mene tekel* that Peter heard from Notre Dame students in 1970. If he had, it is not clear that he would have heeded any more than Peter did. Experience, as Ben Franklin said, keeps an expensive school, but fools will learn in no other.

In retrospect, Smith feels that he and his classmates at Notre Dame in the late '70s "were under attack," because even though Notre Dame claimed to be Catholic, its main mission in life after Father Hesburgh stole the university from the Catholic Church in 1967 was disabusing Catholic undergrads of the last vestiges of sexual morality so that they could go off and become loyal FBI agents and docile wage slaves. "All around us," Smith continues, "were messages that said sex is good, sex is fun, sex is natural. . . . Of course, no one told us, no one showed us, where all this 'free love,' this sexual liberation would lead us. No one showed the hurt feelings, the broken hearts, the shattered dreams, the suffering and the years of pain and emptiness. No one showed us the truth." Smith as a result holds Notre Dame responsible for the trainwreck that his life was to become. "Where," he wonders, "were the shepherds who were to protect the flock? . . . They were wolves in sheep's clothing. Abortion? Never heard of it. Sex outside of marriage? It was tacitly approved." In short, Father Hesburgh and the people under him "either did not believe, or they sold out. . . . At the place some call the preeminent Catholic university we were immersed in the sex and booze and the rock and roll of the destructive mainstream society."

Smith bought into the American dream of material success, as brokered by Notre Dame, which made a name for itself among America's elites by giving its students the illusion that there was no conflict between the American Dream and the Catholic Faith. The net result of that deception is that Smith became so involved in the selfish pursuit of sexual pleasure that he became willing to kill anyone who threatened to interfere with that pleasure, even if that person was his own child. Or, perhaps, better put, especially if that person were his own child.

Smith recounts a conversation with his girlfriend of the time, Ann, who asked him, "Hypothetically, if I told you that I was pregnant, what would you want me to do?" Smith lost no time replying: "I would want you to have an abortion." That was the day on which, as he puts it "It was then that the Devil entered me." That was day that ruined the rest of David Smith's life. From then on his life was "an emptiness broken by strife, and infused with sorrow."

The first thing to die after their child was Smith's relationship with the child's mother. In the same book, Fr. Frank Pavone talks about "the overwhelming despair that comes from abortions that" people like Smith "insisted upon." Daniel Smith's testimony corroborates Pavone's claim:

A wave of despair engulfed me. The despair included physical pain and a withdrawal from everyone around me. I took time off from my job and spent days away from friends and family. . . . The pain was in every fiber of my being, during the hours I was awake, and even during my sleep. There was no respite. There was no end in sight. I had lost the love of my life. I knew it, and felt it and did not know how I would live with it. I despaired.

Sex and booze are the normal antidotes to bad conscience. One father had an affair with a co-worker which led, when discovered, to the break-up of his marriage. The break-up in turn led to alcoholism, pornography addiction, and, ultimately, a suicide attempt before this man could bring himself to admit that abortion was the cause of all of it.

Smith "turned to sex with several women and to partying as a way to deaden my feelings. But it didn't." Nor did recourse to frenzied activity solve the problems other fathers faced after their involvement with abortion. Sometimes the frenzied activity involved otherwise laudable activity. One woman became a model student and devoted all of her waking hours to study to distract herself from the fact that she had killed her own child. Careers for women as well as political activism are often the unacknowledged *sequelae* of abortion. Ultimately all of the book's contributors learned with Smith, that "denial cannot last forever" because "it costs too much energy."

Justifying an abortion is psychically exhausting. Redemption is possible, but it's important to understand just what redemption is and not to be deceived by the illusions which the culture of death proposes as its surrogate. The trauma the abortion wreaks is so great that Smith is forced to admit that "Even after confessing the sin of abortion to my parish priest, it all remained in the closet. With time, it pushed against the door, wanting to come out. Seeing no way for that to happen, anger started to build." Smith's sin may have been forgiven, but his anger remained: "Dealing with the anger required that I accept what

had happened and put it all in its proper place. To do that, I had to face the events of the past, and that in turn meant remembering everything. That is a difficult thing to do."

The ultimate cause of sin is the will, which is free. But the will can be influenced by culture. And one of the main cultural influences in the stories recounted in *Redeeming a Father's Heart* was the military. Virtually every narrative involved the military. The military facilitated abortion because it promoted deracination. Virtually every testimony in *Redeeming a Father's Heart* came from someone who had been in the military. Some of the writers had been raised in military families, and the constant moving that involved made "making and breaking relationships . . . easy." Jonathan Flora writes:

For me, making and breaking relationships was easy—I had done it my whole life. I had learned early and it was all I knew when growing up. Because of my father's Naval career, I attended seven different schools (two outside the US) from the first grade through my senior year in high school. . . . Because military kids were always moving, maybe a third or less of the class that stayed the year together would be intact by the time summer break rolled around. Making and breaking relationships was easy. . . . Later in life breaking up with girls was handled just as easily.

And since breaking those relationship had become easy, it was even easier to break a relationship with a child which, according to the canons of the dominant culture, did not exist. Any unpleasant memories of that child could be exorcised by joining the military and allowing it to put him on the merry-go-round of constant transfers and mindless activity. "In my last semester of high school I signed up for the Air Force," Flora writes, completing the circle that began when he was born into a military family.

Daniel Smith touches on the connection between abortion and deracination obliquely when he blames "radical autonomous individualism" for the fact that "we were isolated from the sources of our lives and so could fall for anything" (p. 58). He also claims that I have helped him understand those forces:

These nefarious ideas did not simply fall out of the sky . . . it was years later after having read the work of Catholic scholars like Gerry Bradley and Michael Jones that I came to see that the myths which we grew up, that surrounded ourselves with late in 20<sup>th</sup> century USA, were just that—myths. Or, to be more blunt, lies. . . . We were told there was a "we," all Americans are one big family and we believed it. But reality was different, as it always is in times of delusion. . . . Smarter? No, we were just arrogant and ignorant of the sophisticated means by which we were being manipulated. Freer? No, just promiscuous and isolated.

The men who ruined their lives became haunted by the ghosts of the children they had killed. One father wrote: "I would have dreams of a phantom male child coming to see me but I couldn't see the face." Abortion causes ghosts; and since those ghosts are a product of guilt, the guilt ridden soul quickly concludes that there is no escape from the past. At this point getting out of town seems like an attractive option. So if motion is a sign of guilt, America must be the most guilt-ridden nation on the face of the earth.

Daniel Smith found redemption in Christ, but like a character in a Hawthorne novel, he realized that the expiation of his sin would take years:

Even after facing the events of long ago, I had to deal with the rage that comes from the knowledge of the reality of what happened. This anger does not easily drain because at the base of it is the sense that we have been emasculated for not protecting our own flesh and blood. With time, that empty chair, that silent room, the hole in my soul left by the loss of this child and his mother, took root in me, and I came to realize that this loss was permanent. . . . Going to Confession, reading tirelessly about abortion, working feverishly in the prolife movement, being nice to people. These things did not bring me back to health. If anything, they caused me to ask, "Why doesn't anyone seem to care about my little one and his mommy?" . . . I learned that I had a Father in heaven who did care and learned that healing would take years of prayer and hard work.

Daniel Smith says that he was a victim of war, or perhaps a victim of the cultural version of "friendly fire." He and the mother of his child "were the targets of what I can only now call a war—a war against people, a war against families, a war against the Truth. . . . Those who created the toxic culture that gave our son less than an even chance must bear responsibility for the little one's death, and for our suffering. . . . I



have come to see clearly how abortion and the culture of death that surrounds it, must, and will one day be brought to an end."

Daniel's story doesn't end when the narrative in the book ends. Unlike the Protestants who gave their testimony in the same book, Daniel did not remarry, nor did he have children by the second wife to replace the child he killed. Daniel lived alone, and so the ghost of the child he killed returned to haunt him in the house he occupied all alone. Perhaps it was the prospect of those long years of expiation, perhaps he needed to forgive himself as God had forgiven him, perhaps it was the fact that he hadn't sired a child to replace the one he killed, perhaps it was the disappointment which came when he realized that the redemption that Christ offered was not a time machine, perhaps he was simply overwhelmed with regret—whatever the reason, Daniel chose the geographical cure, facilitate not by the railroad or the RV but by the US military, which is eager to send you to the Middle East these days. Eventually, in spite of the religion he professed on his lips, Daniel, like Clifford Pyncheon, had to flee the house, go someplace else to get away from the past. That meant Iraq. Daniel re-enlisted. Daniel is fighting the war on terror but, after hours of discussing his story on Interstate 80 in Iowa, Peter and I conclude that Daniel is AWOL in the culture wars.

So 40 years after the summer of love, two babyboomers conclude that the mood is pessimistic. Nothing can turn back time. Time flows in one direction only. The past is immutable. There is nothing you can do to change what you have done. Regret is, of course, anti-American. It contradicts the fundamental American premise, which is if you mess up your life in one place, you can always move farther west and start all over again, as if nothing had ever happened.

The rise of the Mobile Home industry is premised on the institutionalization of that hope. To achieve that end, the mobile home industry promotes deracination as a way of life. It promotes deracination as an identity. The RV is a home on wheels for the permanently deracinated. It entered the canon of American literature 110 years after Hawthorne wrote the House of the Seven Gables, when John Steinbeck wrote *Travels with Charley In Search of America*, the story of Steinbeck's 10,000 mile long RV trip from Maine to California and back again. Steinbeck mentions both South Bend, Indiana and the Wisconsin Dells, Peter's current and ancestral homes. Wisconsin is a state where "everything I saw brought a delight." Most delightful of all were the Wisconsin Dells, "the weird country sculptured by the Ice Age, a strange, gleaming country of water and carved rock, black and green." The main thing Steinbeck remembers about South Bend, Indiana is the Toll Road, which

strings the northern border of Indiana, bypassed Elkhart, South Bend and Gary. The straightness of the way, the swish of traffic, the unbroken speed are hypnotic, and while the miles peel off an imperceptible exhaustion sets on. Day and night are one. The setting sun is neither an invitation or a command to stop, for the traffic rolls constantly.

Steinbeck tells us that he avoids the Interstates because there is nothing to see on the Interstates and that leads him to think about his past, bringing up "the areas of regrets. If only I had done so-and-so, or had not said such-and-such—my God, the damn thing might not have happened." As a result, Steinbeck "avoided the great wide traffic slashes which promote the self by fostering daydreams."

It turns out that Steinbeck, like many Americans from the time of Clifford Pyncheon and after, wanted to travel because he has regrets, but in *Travels with Charley*, he never gets around to telling us just what caused those regrets. Instead, he tells us about his RV. Steinbeck got Ford to build him a customized RV, which he named Rocinante, after Don Quixote's horse. The name gave his quest a literary flavor, even if ultimately the allusion, unlike the RV, went nowhere. More important was the symbolism of the RV, which Steinbeck tells us symbolized the fact that "I had to go alone and I had to be self-contained, a kind of casual turtle carrying his house on his back." (John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley in Search of America* [New York: Penguin, 2002]).

Steinbeck was younger than I am when he wrote *Travels with Charley*, but he sounded like an old man. He was not in good health at the time, having suffered a stroke that was the result of a lifetime of overindulgence in passions that impaired his health. But before long it becomes clear that the main disease pushing Steinbeck toward "senility" is not physical; it is rather "the virus of restlessness" which has taken "possession of a wayward man." Over the course of his 10,000 mile journey, Steinbeck notices "a burning desire to go" all over America:

I saw in their eyes something that I was to see over and over in every part of the nation—a burning desire to go, to move, to get underway, anyplace, away from Here. They spoke quietly of how they wanted to go someday, to move about, free and unanchored, not toward something but away from something. I saw this look and heard this yearning everywhere in every state I visited. (p. 9).

He describes this desire as a disease for which there is no cure. "He (19 year old) had a dream I've had all my life, and there is no cure."

Steinbeck is no Dante; he was well past "the middle of life's road" when he wrote *Travels with Charley*, but like Dante he does find himself in the middle of a dark wood when he gets to Maine. Unlike Dante, however, he never really finds his way out again, most probably because he likes being lost, or at least in the state of perpetual motion that characterizes, as the Marquis de Sade told us, those who live in and support revolutionary societies.

As of 1960, when Steinbeck set off on his trip across America, it was not clear that he had ruined his life. In fact, when looked at from the outside, it looked as if his life was a stupendous success. Steinbeck had achieved heights of fame and fortune which few American writers either before or after him would ever achieve again. When he arrived back home from his RV odyssey, an invitation to the Kennedy inaugural was waiting for him. Two years later Steinbeck went on to receive the Nobel Prize. The publication of *Travels with Charley* in the same year established him as a national treasure, which is the word which always gets used when a writer has nothing more to say, but is still useful to the regime as a propagandist.

In many ways, Steinbeck's travelogue is the antithesis of the memoirs in *Redeeming a Father's Heart*, and yet what both have in common is abortion, and how abortion ruined their lives.

Both men ruined their lives by procuring abortions. The difference is that Steinbeck never understood how he ruined his own life. The very fame and fortune he craved prevented him from ever understanding why a writer who began his career with such promise ended up such a mediocrity.

*The Grapes of Wrath*, which was published in 1939, was a huge success. After years of living the life of the starving artist—his happiest years, of course—Steinbeck awoke to hear fame calling him on the telephone and offering him \$5,000 a week if he would come to Hollywood and write movie scripts. At the height of his success, shortly after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, when Hollywood was beating down his door, offering him \$5000 a week as a script writer (having already paid \$75,000 for the movie rights to *Grapes*), Steinbeck ordered his wife to abort their child. Carol, who happened to be his first wife and (in keeping the formula which would become depressingly familiar over the course of the next 60 years) the one who stood by him when he was a nobody and stayed up late at night typing the manuscripts that would make him famous, wanted a child desperately but put it off in the interest of Steinbeck's career.

Now that his career was flourishing all he could think to do was order her to have an abortion. Carol acquiesced to his request in spite of her better judgment and got a bad infection as a result of the botched abortion. Eventually the infection led to a total hysterectomy, something which Steinbeck's biographer refers to as "an utterly devastating operation for a woman of childbearing age who wanted a child very badly." Needless to say, Carol "never got over the bitterness of this." This bitterness led to bitter recriminations, which were needless to say unpleasant, which in turn drove Steinbeck to seek female companionship outside their marriage. Eventually, Steinbeck divorced Carol and married a singer/actress 19-years his junior by the name of Gwyn Conger, who bore him two children, both of whom ended up hating their father.

Steinbeck, his biographer tells us, "was afraid that fatherhood would interfere with his writing." It turns out that Steinbeck's fears were misplaced. It was abortion, not fatherhood, that destroyed him as a writer.

Steinbeck had been born and raised on a farm near Salinas. His forbears were forty-niners, which in terms of America, meant that they were quasi-aborigines and deeply rooted in their native soil. Abortion changed all that. After Steinbeck packed the invalid Carol off on a trip to Hawaii, he moved in with Gwyn Conger. When Carol returned and confronted him with his infidelity, Steinbeck filed for divorce.

The divorce traumatized Steinbeck. His reputation had been built more on his moral compass—as the man who understood the plight of migrant workers—rather than on any spectacular writing ability, and now that moral compass had been shattered by acts of cruel and gratuitous selfishness, at the height of his career, when he should have been at his magnanimous best. Steinbeck moved in with his friend Ed Ricketts, the main character in *Cannery Row*, who did his best to calm his friend down with "whiskey and conversation," but it soon became apparent that this self-inflicted wound could not be medicated out of existence:

"I've been very raddled and torn out by the roots," he told Ricketts, "Nightmared, etc. . . . I . . . am working hard but I get the horrors pretty often." The only thing, he claimed, that saved him from going crazy was his work. He resolved "not to try to think but to let the work go on."

It's interesting that Steinbeck should mention being "torn out by the roots" as one of the symptoms of his malaise. The abortion uprooted Steinbeck. When Carol threatened to return to California after the

divorce, Steinbeck had to flee. California was now full of unwelcome ghosts. In fleeing Steinbeck destroyed himself as a writer, because if there were ever a writer who was rooted in one place, it was John Steinbeck. Steinbeck was the quintessential California writer. It was the one place he could write about with confidence as *Tortilla Flat*, *Grapes of Wrath*, and *Cannery Row* had shown. But abortion and the return of his wife and the ghosts she brought with her changed all that and brought about the deracination which ultimately ruined him as a writer. Like Clifford Pyncheon, Steinbeck thought he could escape the dead hand of the past by changing his locale, but the move—to New York—eventually destroyed him as a writer. Elia Kazan was one of many New York writers who noticed that Steinbeck did not fit in, no matter how hard he tried.

"It was a mistake," Elia Kazan said. "Steinbeck was a Californian, never a New Yorker. It was a great mistake for him to leave the West Coast. That was the source of his inspiration. He was himself there. In New York, he was awkward, out of place. I think it hurt him as a writer."

Arthur Miller noticed the same thing:

He seemed an ungainly, small-town fellow out of his element, grabbing the check like a provincial—a New York writer would not have thought to pay for ten people he had not invited for dinner; it smacked more of inner uncertainty than confident noblesse. It was cold but he wore not overcoat and enjoyed breathing the sharp wind as we walked toward the park. He seemed like a shackled giant of a man fit for sun, water and earth and not sidewalks and smart people. . . . That the author of prose so definite and painterly could be so personally unsure was beyond my experience. (Jay Parini, *John Steinbeck: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, p. 486).

Eventually, the disparity between the promise that Steinbeck showed in the '30s and the hack he had become by the '60s, began to be formulated as what Daniel R. Noble called "the Steinbeck question":

Why is it that the work of this enormously popular author is disappearing from the pages of anthologies even faster than the works of Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald and other major figures of the traditional canon?

The answer to that question is abortion. Steinbeck destroyed himself as a writer when he murdered his child. In order to survive from one day to the next Steinbeck had to medicate his conscience with booze and amphetamines. Medicating the conscience is never a good idea, but it is especially fatal for a writer whose main claim to fame was being the conscience of a nation.

As is so often the case in history, war provided Steinbeck with the *deus ex machina* that would release him from the psychic prison which his selfishness had created for him. In the fall of 1941 he was called to Washington to consult with the Roosevelt administration about setting up a propaganda ministry, one that eventually came into being under the name of The Foreign Information Service.

Steinbeck then devoted himself to propaganda, an addiction that proved more powerful than his dependence on booze and amphetamines. Because of his new-found career as a government propagandist, Steinbeck's life had "become frenetic and confusing." The first fruit of this collaboration was *The Moon is Down*, a novel which Parini characterizes as "as an unabashed piece of propaganda." Steinbeck, according to Parini, "was never paid for his work. But he enjoyed saying rather facetiously that he wrote his next novel, *The Moon is Down*, on assignment for this agency."

To the impecunious writer, propaganda may seem like an easy way to earn money. But Steinbeck was hardly impecunious at this point in his life, and so we must seek for the attraction which propaganda held for him elsewhere. Parini provides a clue when he notes that, "propaganda is after all the art of deception." Steinbeck was now being paid to deceive people, his own people, about the war effort. The prospect seemed attractive to him not because he needed the money but because he was interested in deceiving himself about the kind of person he had become. War was good for that because it made his duplicitous behavior to his wife seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, a scheme which he was now weaving. Steinbeck now had the full force of the government on his side in his ongoing battle with his own troubled conscience. With a plausibility that could convince everyone but the man for whom the deception was intended, Steinbeck could say that the decision to go east was prompted not by Carol's decision to return to California but by America's entry into the war.

Steinbeck was once a writer whose conscience moved the nation. After the abortion, he became a propagandist and then a standing joke in the publishing world that continued to promote him because of the money he could bring in. After Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize in 1962, Arthur Mizener wrote a

critique in the *New York Times*, in which he claimed that "after *The Grapes of Wrath*, most "serious readers" had stopped reading Steinbeck, whose work was marred everywhere by "sentimentality." Mizener swept through the writer's career, stopping at every book from *In Dubious Battle* on to mock and belittle." (p. 448).

When Steinbeck was sent to Russia as the representative *Homo Americanus*,

One Russian reader . . . began harassing John with questions about why he once wrote books that attacked the capitalist system but caved in later. This made John furious and he would scream back at them things like, "You son-of-a-bitch, don't you realize that times change, that America in the 30s was different from America in the '50s" and so on. (p. 452).

Once Steinbeck succeeded in anesthetizing his conscience, he no longer saw the injustices that had moved him when he was younger. After receiving the Nobel Prize, Steinbeck was invited to tour Israel, but while there he ignored the Palestinians, who were living in camps much worse and much more permanent than the camps of migrant workers in California which had inspired him to write *The Grapes of Wrath*. "The Steinbeck of three decades earlier," Parini writes, "would surely have sniffed out the injustice—or at least the tragic contradictions—inherent in this situation" (p. 470). But Steinbeck did not because his conscience had now taken a back seat to other considerations, like his career and the sensibilities of Harold Guinzberg, to whom he dedicated *Travels with Charley*, and the New York publishing industry.

Steinbeck could no longer write even short fiction because "nothing would cohere," (p. 471). Instead, spurred on by the success of *Travels with Charley* and the Nobel Prize, Steinbeck reinvented himself as a cracker-barrel moral theologian who could now fulminate against the moral decay plaguing his country. "Why," Steinbeck wonders in *America and Americans*, the 1966 sequel to *Travels with Charley*, "are we on this verge of moral and hence nervous collapse?" Based on his reading of history, Steinbeck concludes that "it is because we have reached the end of the road and have no new path to take, no duty to carry out, and no purpose to fulfill" (p. 140). At this point we begin to wonder whether Steinbeck is addressing his fellow Americans or himself. Instead of answering that question, Steinbeck wanders off into an attack on overpopulation, a ruling class obsession in the mid-'60s.

The same unfortunate tendency to propaganda is evident in *Travels with Charley*, a book in which Steinbeck becomes a shill for deracination in general and the mobile home industry in particular. Product placement became commonplace in the movie industry by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but so far no one has located its beginning in literature. *Travels with Charley* might be a good place to start. In *Travels*, Steinbeck never tells us how much he paid for his RV. In reading *Travels*, one gets the impression that the RV was comped in exchange for favorable publicity.

The mobile home, Steinbeck tells us, is "wonderfully built," with "aluminum skins, double-walled with insulation and often paneled with veneer or hardwood. . . . They have two to five rooms, and are complete with air-conditioners, toilets, baths, and invariably television. . . . A mobile home is drawn to the trailer park and installed on a ramp, a heavy rubber sewer pipe is bolted underneath, water and electric power is connected, the television antenna is raised and the family is in residence."

Steinbeck is impressed: "It seemed to me a revolution in living and on a rapid increase. Why did a family choose to live in such a home? Well, it was comfortable, compact, easy to keep clean and easy to heat." And on top of that the factory workers who live in these rattletraps don't have to worry about job security or decent wages any more because "If a plant or a factory closes down, you're not trapped with property you can't sell. . . . if he has a mobile home he rents a trucking service and moves on and he hasn't lost anything. He may never have to do it, but the fact that he can is a comfort to him" (p. 76). After dining with the folks in the mobile homes and watching football games on their television sets with them, Steinbeck concludes "that permanence is neither achieved nor desired by mobile people."

"From start to finish I found no strangers," Steinbeck wrote of his travels in search of America. This, however, is not what he wrote to his third wife Elaine, in one of the many letters that served as the basis for the book he would write when he got back home. "These are Martians," he told Elaine, referring to the mobile home people he had just praised, "I wanted to ask them to take me to their leader. They have no humor, no past and their future is new models." He added: "If ever I am looking for a theme—this restless mobility is a good one" (Parini, p. 424).

We have no record of what he talked about in the cramped metallic living room of the RV in front of the TV, but the esoteric Steinbeck felt that sports were "the national distraction designed to keep the mind of the nation preoccupied and away from dangerous subjects like foreign policy or the economic system" (p. 425). "The Conscience of America" had concluded privately that the country was "a corpse":

There were wishes but no wants. And underneath it all the building energy like gases in a

corpse. When that explodes, I tremble to think what will be the result. Over and over I thought we lack the pressures that make men strong and the anguish that makes men great. The pressures are debts, the desires are for more material toys and the anguish is boredom. Through time the nation has become a discontented land.

This, of course, is not the impression one gets from reading *Travels with Charley*, especially when Steinbeck interviews Joe from Tuscany and his Irish wife and the subject of roots comes up. "One of our most treasured feelings concerns roots," Steinbeck begins, "growing up rooted in some soil or some community. How did they feel about raising their children without roots? Was it good or bad? Would they miss it or not?"

Joe from Tuscany has no patience with this kind of talk because Joe's father came from a home which lacked a television and other modern conveniences, like the modern kitchen Joe's Irish wife is bustling around in after their meal together.

"My father came from Italy," Joe opines to the Conscience of America:

He grew up in Tuscany in a house where his family had lived maybe a thousand years. That's roots for you. No running water, no toilet, and they cooked with charcoal or vine clippings. They had just two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom where everybody slept, grandpa father and all the kids, no place to read, no place to be alone, and never had had. Was that better? I bet if you gave my old man the choice he'd cut his roots and live like this.

Joe then adverts to his wife. "Now you take my wife," he continued sounding like Henny Youngman. "She's of Irish descent; her people had roots too. . . ." and before Joe can finish his sentence, his wife adds, "In a peat bog . . . and lived on potatoes." Steinbeck then looks at her as "she gazed fondly through the door at her fine kitchen" (p. 79).

Once again Steinbeck drags the labor issue into the discussion of roots but not in the way he treated the issue in *The Grapes of Wrath*. There is not such thing as "permanence" in American life because when the "Factory closes down, you move on. Good times and things opening up, you move on where it's better."

If "You got roots," Joe concludes, "you sit and starve."

Once again Steinbeck the propagandist (or the people into whose mouths his words get put) invariably parrots the ruling class line on anything of importance. Reading *Travels* is a bit like hearing Ma Joad give a glowing endorsement of the California Growers Association. If cheap labor is the greatest commandment of the unwritten American constitution, labor mobility is its second greatest commandment, and here we have two deracinated Catholics extolling the very thing that the American ruling class has desired ever since the country was founded. Is it any wonder the ruling class considered Steinbeck a national treasure? With a conscience like this, America needed no corrupting.

Lest Joe's point be too subtle for the average reader, Steinbeck concludes with a panegyric on deracination that follows in an uncanny way from Clifford Pyncheon's declamation on the railroad. Hawthorne viewed rootlessness as a technology-fueled temptation for Americans. One hundred and ten years later Steinbeck claimed that Americans are by definition rootless:

Could it be that Americans are a restless people, a mobile people, never satisfied with where they are as a matter of selection? The pioneers, the immigrants who peopled the continent, were the restless ones in Europe. . . . Roots were in ownership of land, in tangible and immovable possessions. In this view we are a restless species with a very short history of roots, and those not widely distributed. Perhaps we have overrated roots as a psychic need. Maybe the greater the urge, the deeper and more ancient is the need, the will, the hunger to be somewhere else.

At the end of day one we arrive at the Winnebago plant in Forrest City, Iowa. In order to get there we have to travel north on Interstate 35, which is the road which crosses the bridge that collapsed when we were heading toward Minneapolis. Had we continued on that road we might have ended up in the Mississippi like the rest of the commuting crowd, but Forest City isn't that far north. The dusty lot is full of the behemoths of the Interstate, veritable castles on wheels, Class A Motorhomes with metal blisters on their roofs concealing state of the art electronic devices that allow them to communicate through the ether with each other, watch television broadcast from satellites, and, for all I know, deflect incoming

missiles. Because Peter did not yet have his CDL, we had to content ourselves with a Class C Ithaska, mounted on the updated version of the Ford truck that was the basis of Steinbeck's *Rocinante*. Wandering around inside what was to be our home on wheels for the next three days, I find myself wondering what is in the Class A motorhomes, because our Ithaska had a bunk over the cab, a sofa which converted into a bed, a kitchen table with chairs, a stove and sink, a bathroom with a sink and shower, and a master bedroom hanging out behind the rear wheels. Peter is relieved that our vehicle is relatively modest, because the bigger they come the harder they are to drive, and the fewer possibilities there are to park them.

Having spent the day on the road, we decided to spend the night in Crystal Lake, a small Iowa town a few miles down the road. The main attraction from our point of view is the lake, which offers swimming to two sweaty and cramped Hoosiers. At this point a dip in the crystalline waters of the eponymous lake seems even more inviting than a hot meal. And so after pulling into the parking lot we plunge into Crystal Lake. Actually, we had to wade about a hundred yards into the lake before the water reached our thighs. We then sort of plunged into the muddiest water I have ever immersed myself in and paddled around in it for the next hour or so. When we drove into town past the statue of a massive catfish, we learned the mystery of the wildly misnamed Crystal Lake. The lake is in the process of being dredged to get back to its pristine clarity. The locals also plan to kill all of the fish in the lake and replace them (which judging from the statue in the center of town means catfish) with fish of a better sort.

The proprietors of the only restaurant in town, reopen their establishment to feed us. They are amazed that we have come all the way from far-away Indiana, but the main topic of conversation that evening is the bridge that collapsed. Since we now have our own RV we can sleep pretty much where we damn well please, which in this instance means a parking lot next to Crystal Lake. It is the best spot of the trip.

Crystal Lake brings to mind the fact that America and Americans are in many ways two separate things. America was once a continent full of promise; it was succeeded by a metaphysical concept which espoused one thing (freedom) and delivered something else (bondage). People from all over the world have been trying to live in this brave new world for centuries now, failing or succeeding, but becoming who they are, which for the most part means open and friendly, if a bit superficial, and willing to open up a restaurant for two strangers, whose bill comes in at somewhere under \$12. After our meal at the town's only restaurant, we stop at the town's only gas station and admire a motorcycle on display surrounded by the town's young men.

"Are you heading to Sturgis?" I ask.

## **Chapter 2: Thursday, August 2**

We stop for breakfast at a McDonald's and before I can complete my order, the cashier, a plump corn-fed middle aged blonde interrupts me to ask if I'm a movie star. I tell her, no, I'm Senator John Kerry (During the 2004 election campaign, black people would greet me on the street as Senator Kerry), but she doesn't believe me. She also doesn't believe me when I tell her that I am neither a movie nor a TV star. When we get up to leave, she comes over to me and the questioning continues, this time with physical contact included. She keeps poking my arm and shoulder, as if to see if I'm real and not just a phantasm of her TV drenched imagination.

Iowa is nothing but an endless sea of genetically modified corn and soybeans, destined to become either the staff of life for junk food culture (80 percent of everything in the supermarket has corn in it) or fuel for the nation's cars (either ethanol or biodiesel). As a sign of the future, a sign in north central Iowa announces the construction of yet another ethanol plant. Trying to see the silver lining in this cloud, I concluded that if ethanol fails as a fuel we can all drink ourselves into oblivion, since the nation will probably lead the world in alcohol production.

The terrain in southern Minnesota isn't much different. It's pretty much wall to wall corn and soybeans until we cross the South Dakota border; then the cornfields begin to alternate with fields of grazing land we reach Mitchell. After Mitchell, the countryside turns into a vast ocean of brownish yellow grass, with an occasional sparse tree, not unlike what I saw in the rift valley in Kenya. By the time we reach the end of the state, the savannah has begun a gradual change into the high plains of western legend. In the high plains there are hills and they are topped with pine trees.

Before long, it becomes apparent that there are no towns anymore. There are cities, and there are gas stations. Gas stations have replaced the towns and villages that people like Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, of nearby Sauk Centre, South Dakota, used to write about. I'm talking about big Gas stations, like the Flying J truck stops, which include restaurants, convenience stores, showers, casinos and clothing stores which seem to specialize in Harley-Davidson lingerie. The proliferation of Harley products at the gas station convenience stores, as well as the proliferation of motorcycles on Interstate 90, is an indication that we are nearing Sturgis, South Dakota just in time for the annual biker rally.

As with the summer of Love, I feel that I'm 40 years too late, or in the case of the biker rally, maybe four. The Biker Rally, which has taken place every year since 1938, is in a period of probably permanent decline. Attendance at the rally peaked in 2003, when 600,000 bikers showed up. The cause of the decline is demographic. In spite of a large influx of baby boomers into Harley Culture in the late '80s and '90s, the median age of a Harley Rider is now pushing 50, and the earlier generation, not known for the moderation that leads to longevity, has a tendency to die young.

The sidewalks of Sturgis are full of venerable bikers, with lack of moderation written on their leather-like faces, sitting in the shade, stroking their gray beards, regaling each other with stories of biker rallies past or the merits of various customized motorcycle parts. Main Street is full of motorcycles but not yet closed off to traffic. At that point, a double row of motorcycles will run down the middle of the street, parallel to the two rows of motorcycles already parked by the curb, making the normal flow of traffic impossible.

Peter and I arrive in Sturgis at the end of the day, just in time for the tentative beginnings of this year's biker rally, which is to say, before the bacchanal begins in earnest. Sturgis is a blue-collar Dionysian festival; it is an annual Woodstock for folks with grease under their fingernails.

Back in the day, which is say in 1965 when the publishing industry was pushing rape fantasies, people like Freewheelin' Frank Reynolds of the Hell's Angels created the Dionysian ambiance that places like Sturgis and Daytona have been living off of ever since, according to the law of diminishing returns. Back then the biker rally began with "what looked like a barbarian sale of women." Then, "as the evening shadows closed in" and

the trees seemed covered with black smoke. The moon was full and the howls of the women as they were being raped rang out in the night. This was the biggest sex orgy we had ever had in our lifetime. Everyone by this time was covered with filth from falling in the lake and wallowing in the dust and sloshing wine over each other. The smell of sexual orgies reeked along with the honeywind of marijuana. In some jagged stumplike corners of the forest certain characters were rolling up their sleeves and geezing their arms full of crystal and opiates, jacking themselves completely off the ground in their insane way. Everyone was completely mad. (Frank Reynolds as told to Michael McClure, *Freewheelin' Frank: Secretary of the Angels* (New York: Grove Press, 1967, pp. 104-5).

Those were the days, weren't they? But in Sturgis these days, as at Bike Week in Daytona, the bacchanal isn't what it used to be. Indecent exposure, i.e., ladies bearing their breasts within the city limits, is now punishable with a \$150 fine. As if to test the limits of the law early on, a young woman wearing a red-white-and blue costume (Sturgis is nothing if not patriotic) bears her breasts on the sidewalk in front of us, attracting a gaggle of graybeards who line up to be photographed standing next to her. Just to be sure she is on the right side of the law, however, the young lady has placed red, white and blue band-aids over her nipples. Like Notre Dame, and John Steinbeck's Monterey, Sturgis has become a theme park, which evokes a spirit of lawlessness in a setting carefully calibrated to make sure that it doesn't go beyond the law and no one gets hurt, seriously that is.

Of course, every year a number of people die while riding their motorcycles to Sturgis, and this year was no exception. William Xaver of Plymouth, Indiana, 30 miles south of South Bend, died on his way to Sturgis when "his beloved Honda Gold Wing. . . suddenly swerved onto the gravel roadway and flipped over, tossing Xaver, who was reportedly not wearing a helmet, from his motorcycle." According to a story which appeared in the Fort Dodge, Iowa *Messenger*, "witnesses to the crash reported that Xaver was not speeding or riding recklessly, but appeared to be having trouble controlling his motorcycle prior to the crash." Xaver left behind a widow, who told Adam Jackson of *The South Bend Tribune*, "I guess if there is one thing that helps us feel a little better, it's that we know he died doing something that he loved" (Adam Jackson, "Plymouth motorcyclist killed in Iowa crash," *South Bend Tribune*, 8/7/07).

Less than fatal injury is also evident in the crowd walking (or hobbling) up and down Main Street in Sturgis. More than one man was walking on a prosthetic foot. The casualty statistics are uniformly grim. Depending on the agency which compiles the statistics, anywhere between 70 and 90 percent of all motorcycle accidents result in serious injury. A biker is five times more likely to die in an accident than the driver of an automobile. This explains the proliferation of insurance companies among the vendors on Main Street. Geico, in keeping with its usual ad campaigns, tries to be cheeky and talks about bikers having bugs between their teeth while one of the few black men in town hands out shopping bags with the Geico logo on them. Allstate, perhaps having pondered the above statistics more deeply, takes the "we deeply respect your decision" approach and sounds a bit like the doctor who hears that you're not going to undergo chemo for the cancer that has spread throughout your body.

Aside from the bikes and the broads and the tattoos, Sturgis is pretty much wall-to-wall vendors. In fact, when I asked a biker at a gas station on the way, what drew him to Sturgis, the first word out his mouth was not bikes or broads but "Vendors." The vendors, of course, all bring their own girls, who look to be

old enough to be the grandchildren of the bikers. The Jaegermeister girls are perched on their colorful orange Jaegermeister motortricycle and surrounded by another gaggle of graybeards eager to have their pictures taken with them.

I'm sure you could learn more than you want to know about biker culture by attending, say, the coleslaw wrestling contest at Bike Week in Daytona, but to understand biker culture in any depth, you need to go to Sturgis, because biker culture is a cultural phenomenon which never would have come into being if the West, with all of its mythic associations, had not been there to spawn it.

If the RV is the modern version of the Conestoga wagon, then the motorcycle is the modern equivalent of the horse. This means, of course, that the biker is the modern day equivalent of the cowboy. Since the cowboys were veterans of the Civil War who never made it back home to the America that war destroyed, the other important thing you need to know to understand biker culture is that it is a reaction to war. Hunter S. Thompson, recently deceased as the result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, wrote a book on the Hell's Angels which appeared in 1967 and remains to this day the best analysis of the genesis of biker culture and its connection to the American West. If the cowboys were the disaffected veterans of the Civil War, the bikers were the disaffected veterans of World War II and Vietnam, the boys who never made it back to the world those wars destroyed. Biker culture is both a creation of and a reaction to war. "Ever since the end of World War II," Thompson writes,

the West Coast has been plagued by gangs of young, wild men on motorcycles, roaming the highways in groups of ten to thirty and stopping whenever they get thirsty or road-cramped to suck up some beer and make noise. . . . The whole thing was born, they say, in the late 1940s, when most GIs wanted to get back to an orderly pattern: college, marriage, a job, children—all the peaceful extras that come with a sense of security. But not everyone felt that way. Like the drifters who rode west after Appomattox, there were thousands of veterans in 1945 who flatly rejected the idea of going back to a prewar pattern. They didn't want order, but privacy and time to figure things out. It was a nervous, downhill feeling, a mean kind of angst that always comes out of wars. . . a compressed sense of time on the outer limits of fatalism. They wanted more action, and one of the ways to look for it was on a big motorcycle. By 1947 the state was alive with bikes, nearly all of them powerful American-made irons from Harley-Davidson and Indian [now defunct]. . . . The root definition remains the same . . . a dangerous hoodlum on a big, fast motorcycle. And California has been breeding them for years (Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: the Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* [New York: Random House, 1967], p. 59).

Thompson claims that the concept of the "motorcycle outlaw" was "as uniquely American as jazz."

Nothing like them had ever existed. In some ways they appeared to be a kind of half-breed anachronism, a human hangover from the era of the wild west. Yet in other ways they were as new as television. There was absolutely no precedent, in the years after World War II, for large gangs of hoodlums on motorcycles, reveling in violence, worshipping mobility and thinking nothing of riding five hundred miles on a weekend (Thompson, p. 68).

The biker as an American icon made its first appearance over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend in Hollister, California. A motorcycle gang called the Booze Fighters arrived there to attend the motorcycle races and, after hours of drunken carousing and fighting, overpowered the local gendarmerie, and took over the town.

Just as the Mass is the solemn re-enactment of the drama of Calvary, Sturgis is a not-so-solemn liturgical re-enactment of the Hollister riot. It is a modern day Feast of Fools in which the normal order of life is turned up-side down. The jester gets to sit in the bishop's chair and all of the prayers are said backwards. Once a year in Sturgis, the bikers get to take over the town just as they did in Hollister, California in 1947.

Just as the Booze Fighters took over Hollister, the media of the dominant culture took over the Booze Fighters and turned them into a parable of troubled youth and a cautionary tale for the nation. The Booze Fighters became symbols of deviance when *Life* magazine ran a short-hundred word article on the Hollister incident, complete with staged photo of motorcycle thug astride his bike swilling beer amid a sea of empty bottles. According to Daniel Wolf,

The national exposure that was given the Hollister incident by *Life* magazine and others resulted in the stigmatization of an image: the motorcyclists as deviant. *Life's* account started a mass-media chain reaction that saw the Hollister incident grow considerably in its



sensationalistic portrayal, and, as a result, the image of the motorcyclist as deviant became more defined and immutable. In 1949, Frank Rooney wrote a short narrative entitled "Cyclist Raid," based on *Life's* 115-word documentary. In 1951, "Cyclist Raid" was published in *Harper's* magazine. The *Harper's* serial was read by Stanley Kramer, a Hollywood producer, who immortalized the 'motorcycle riot' in the movie *The Wild One*, released in 1953. The anti-hero image of the motorcyclist was cast in the person of Marlon Brando, while Lee Marvin personified the motorcyclist as villain (Daniel R. Wolf, *The Rebels: A Brotherhood of Outlaw Bikers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991, p. 5).

Hollywood tried to turn the Hollister riot into an enigmatic parable about troubled youth but instead rendered the story incomprehensible because they left out the essential element, namely, the fact that it was disaffected veterans who drove the biker phenomenon. To hint that veterans could be disenchanted with the land that they fought to defend was medicine too strong for Hollywood to either take or sell, since Hollywood had been heavily involved in making propaganda for the war effort. However, Booze Fighter 'Wino Willie' Forkner tells a different story. He was neither Marlon Brando nor Lee Marvin, but rather "had returned from the Second World War after fighting the Japanese as a waist gunner and engineer for the American Seventh Air Force." His account makes Hollister sound less apocalyptic than the voice over in *The Wild One* and more like the sort of thing that drunken sailors got involved in while on shore leave:

The worst thing that happened was that a bunch of guys wanted to break Red Daldren out of jail. I was in a bar and somebody came in and said there were about 500 bikers ready to break him out, and I thought, 'Shit, that's all we need, something like that.' So I ran down to where the crowd was assembling and told 'em, 'Hell, old Red's drunk and he needs a good night's sleep. Leave him stay—he'll be out in the morning.' Then I turned around and went back to the bar, and damned if the cops didn't come and nail me for inciting a riot [the charges were dropped] . . . but no big bad things happened. There were a few broken windows that we paid for (Interview in *Easyriders*, Sept 1986, p. 107 also in Wolf, p.7).

Once Hollywood got involved in the Hollister riot, they created an image of deviance—complete with a line of clothing: denim jeans, black leather jackets, engineer boots—that took on a life of its own. In 1972, *Life* magazine, which got this ball rolling 25 years before, took stock of what it and Hollywood had wrought: "*The Wild One* became a milestone in movie history, launching the cult of gang violence in films. It also helped create an image of motorcycling that non-violent bike riders have been trying to live down for a quarter of a century now" (*Life*, September 1972, p. 32).

Law enforcement agencies came to see bikers increasingly as a criminal subculture. In 1984 the Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada claimed that outlaw motorcycle gangs had become as much of a threat as the Mafia. But the bikers viewed themselves "as nothing less than frontier heroes, living out the 'freedom ethic' that they feel the rest of society has largely abandoned." War, once again, is the only concept that reconciled these conflicting accounts.

The cowboy is the soldier who never made it back after the Civil War. The biker is the soldier who never made it back after WW II and Vietnam. The biker is the modern-day cowboy. Hell's Angels began as WW II veterans; *The Wild One* is *The Sun Also Rises*, but for unliterary proles, the mechanics of the land, who had no future in corporate America. Hunter Thompson cites Frenchy, a 29-year-old veteran who was a submariner when he was in the Navy as the typical Hell's Angel, because he is "unskilled and uneducated, with no social or economic credentials beyond a colorful police record and a fine knowledge of motorcycles." Frenchy and his Hell's Angels buddies

are out of the ball game and they know it. Unlike the campus rebels, who with a minimum amount of effort will emerge from their struggle with a validated ticket to status, the outlaw motorcyclist views the future with the baleful eye of a man who knows no upward mobility at all. In a world increasingly geared to specialists, technicians, and fantastically complicated machinery, the Hell's Angels are obvious losers and it bugs them. But instead of submitting quietly to their collective fate, they have made it the basis of a full-time social vendetta. They don't expect to win anything, but on the other hand, they have nothing to lose.

Missing from all of the hype was a simple fact: the biker gangs of the late '40s and '50s were a lower class protest movement against the social engineering which followed World War II. The motorcycle became a potent symbol of lower class rebellion against the culture of social engineering which they could not

understand. Hollywood, in this regard, engaged in an act of deliberate mystification by obscuring the real roots of the men they portrayed in *The Wild One*. Daniel Wolf talks about the lower class nature of the biker gangs and about how he used the motorcycle to transcend the narrow confines of the lower-middle class neighborhood where he was raised:

I rode my motorcycle in anger; for me it became a show of contempt and a way of defying the privileged middle class that had put me down and had kept my parents 'in their place.' I felt that the Establishment had done me no favours and that I owed it even less. At that time I saw outlaw bikers as a reflection of my own dark side. I made them the embodiment of my own youthful rebellion and resentment. In retrospect, I believe that it was this aspect of my nonacademic background—the fact that I had learned to ride and beat the streets—that made it possible for me to contemplate such a study, and eventually to ride with the rebels.

Wolf says, "Becoming a biker constitutes a search for identity" (p. 30). The outlaw motorcycle gang is "a class-specific response to the general problem of self-actualization." Modern industrial culture, driven by the twin demons of cheap labor and labor mobility, promotes deracination as the simplest way to create a pool of docile worker. This deracination, however, creates an intolerable cultural and psychic vacuum. In a world in which neither work nor community can provide either psychic rewards or identity, the worker is forced to look elsewhere. "Why," Wolf asks,

Why does the lower working class produce candidates for biker subculture? The answer lies in the culture of the streets and in the workplace. It is a modern-day urban setting that lacks symbols and activities around which to build a personal identity, and is largely devoid of meaningful collective endeavors around which to build a sense of community. Often the only identity available to a manual laborer is that of a cog in an impersonal machine. He begins each day by punching in his number to an assembly line, his work task is not his decision but that of a management whose face he never sees, the pace of his work is decided by a machine, and there is no variation in the grinding monotony of petty tasks unless the machinery breaks down. The same pattern repeats itself day after day with no prospect of change. He simply sweats a lot and leaves a little of himself behind at the factory each day. While he receives a pay cheque, he finds himself short-changed in meaning. Whether you call it 'alienation' or label it 'anomie' he is deprived of adequate psychological payoff in the way of life-expanding experiences and identity-confirming ritual. Isolation from meaningful social participation and the subsequent psychological experience of inadequate identity fulfillment may result in a personal search for self-authenticity. If the laborer is a young man in search of himself, he will find nothing in his self-image at work that will excite him; he had best look elsewhere. Men who are chained to these circumstances share a compelling desire to escape. (p. 31).

Alienated from the traditional sources of resistance which religion can inspire, totally unaware of the panoply of social engineering arrayed against him, deracinated and alienated from his ethnic roots, the biker turns to the only thing he knows, namely, machinery and derives his identity from an expensive machine. "The biker," according to Wolf, "is a man who has turned to a machine to find himself. He has learned how to find both meaning and pleasure in the man-machine relationship, and he uses his motorcycle to create peak emotional experiences that are worth living for. . . . He controls the machine, and he writes the rules. His bike is his 'two-wheeled freedom.'"

The graybeards who assemble each year in Sturgis are part of what Wolf calls "a lower-working class bohemian subculture" which uses an expensive consumer item "to create an identity."

The ideological foundation of the subculture accurately reflects the lower-working-class origins of its participants. A man who enters this subculture in search of identity looks to the outlaw-biker tradition to provide him with long-standing values, behaviours and symbols. What he will find are heroes and role models, a personal legacy that is consistent with what he discovered on the streets about the complete man. He will adopt attitudes and learn behaviors that gravitate around lower-class focal concerns with independence, freedom, self-reliance, toughness, impulsiveness, and masculinity, all of which will be embodied in a highly romanticized image of the anti-hero (p. 33).

Thompson claims that Hell's Angels descended from the Linkhorns, Nelson Algren's term for the poor white trash who descended from the indentured servants who migrated to America from England throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The biker gangs, in other words, are the descendants of the Okies and Arkies

that Steinbeck wrote about in *The Grapes of Wrath*. If Steinbeck had hung around California, he might have written the definitive biker novel. But he didn't, and Hunter Thompson, no novelist, wrote his New Journalism piece instead, full of echoes out of *The Grapes of Wrath*:

Some stayed behind and their lineal descendants are still there—in the Carolinas, Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee. There were dropouts all along the way: hillbillies, Okies, Arkies—They're all the same people. Texas is a living monument to the breed. So is Southern California. . . . Algren called them "fierce craving boys" with "a feeling of having been cheated." Freebooters, armed and drunk—a legion of gamblers, brawlers and whorehoppers. Bowling into town in a junk Model A with bald tires, no muffler, and one headlight. . . looking for quick work, with no questions asked and preferably no tax-deductions. Just get the cash, fill up at a cut rate gas stations and hit the road with a pint on the seat and Eddy Arnold on the radio moaning good, back-country tunes about home sweet home, that Bluegrass sweet heart still waiting, and roses on Mama's grave. . . . Algren left the Linkhorns in Texas, but anyone who drives the Western highway knows they didn't stay there either. They kept on moving until one day in the late 1930s they stood on the spine of a scrub-oak Californian hill and looked down on the Pacific Ocean. . . .When the war ended, California was full of veterans looking for ways to spend their separation bonuses. Many decided to stay on the Coast, and while their new radios played hillbilly music they went out and bought big motorcycles—not knowing exactly why, but in the booming, rootless atmosphere of those times, it seemed like the thing to do.

The Booze Fighters who caused the riot in Hollister in '47 were the rootless spawn of the Arkies and Okies that Steinbeck found in the migrant worker camps during the '30s. Terry the Tramp symbolizes the deracination of the motorcycle gang. He is, Thompson tells us,

"from" Detroit, Norfolk, Long Island, Los Angeles, Fresno, and Sacramento. As a child he lived all over the country, not in poverty but in total mobility. Like most of the others, he has no roots. . . . His longest bout with stability was a three-year hitch in the Coast Guard after finishing high school. Since then he has worked half-heartedly as a tree-trimmer, mechanic, bit actor, laborer and hustler of various commodities. . . . He tried college for a few months but quit to get married. After two years, two children and numerous quarrels, the marriage ended in divorce. He had another child, by his second wife, but that union didn't last either. Now, after two hugely publicized rape arrests, he refers to himself as an "eligible bachelor." (p. 156).

World War II had a lot to do with the Hell's Angels origins. John B. Watson, at the beginning of his book *Behaviorism*, said war and social engineering go hand in hand. Wars have always been followed by periods of isolationism and anomie, like the one which characterized American life from 1920 to 1940. Biker gangs were the '50s equivalent of The Lost Generation of the 1920s, a generation that had been deeply affected by World War I, and then made a bad situation worse by their self-indulgence during the 1920s.

The big difference between the Booze Fighters and the Lost Generation is that, unlike 1919, World War II did not end after 1945. Instead, the nation's leaders, intoxicated by their victory over fascism, worked toward the permanent militarization of American culture. President Eisenhower noticed it and warned against it in his farewell address in 1959, but that militarization had already had a head start by 1959 and continued apace. Sooner or later, a reaction was inevitable, because, as Robert Nisbet put it in 1975, when the nation was suffering through the reaction to the war in Vietnam,

There is nothing so constrictive of freedom, of creativeness, and of genuine individuality as the military in its relation to culture. . . . As soon as the special character of the military power begins to envelop a population . . . a kind of suffocation of mind in the cultural sphere begins. . . . Populations . . . quickly become restive unless the strongest and most formidable measures are taken by military authorities to curb them; unless propaganda, force and even terror become almost incessant (p. 136).

The biggest fear of the regime after WW II was the backlash which had occurred after WW I. In order to avoid a repeat of the Bonus Army debacle, the government created the GI Bill, VHA loans, Levittown, the Civil Rights Movement, and intensified social engineering as the antidote against backlash that they expected from 11 million returning GIs.

By destroying the ethnic neighborhoods of America's big cities and the local high schools of America's

small towns, social engineering, of course, destroyed the only matrix that could have reintegrated the returning soldiers and so as a result pockets of the unreassimilated began to crop up in places like California, where most of the GIs landed after returning from the Pacific Theater.

War, which destroys family and tradition and the social order, both enabled and disabled the protest against social engineering that lay at the root of biker culture. War accelerated the destruction of kinship and religion that gave people roots. Once the social matrix was weakened, the state, in Nisbet's words, "slowly takes over many of the functions previously resident in family, religion, guild and other social institutions to become, as in our day, an economic, social, moral, and intellectual Leviathan." The military also "liberated" its members from the moral order. War, as Nisbet points out, "creates opportunity for what can only be called 'licensed immorality'" (p. 142) not only on the battlefield but also in the realm of sexual conduct.

It was under the steady impact of the Roman Republic's wars, first foreign, then civil as well as foreign, that the destruction of the Roman family system gradually began. It was not easy for young Romans, after a number of years in the field where every form of violation of the canons of continence was scarcely more than routine, to return to the iron morality of the traditional Roman family system, with its built-in coercions, constraints, and subjections to patriarch and matriarch. The great wave of immorality that hit Roman society in the first century BC so well attested to by contemporary essayists, and that the Emperor Augustus strove valiantly to terminate through laws and decrees, had its origins in war.

Biker culture in this regard was as much a symptom of war as it was a protest against it and the invisible social engineering which followed in its wake. Biker culture was, as Wolf points out, a *bohemian* subculture, which means that the returning GI's had declared war on the family, marriage, and monogamy after their country had declared war on Japan. Deracination and the military had been the opening barrage in this war. In fact without real wars like World War II and Vietnam, we never would have had the culture wars of the 1960s because, as every thinker from time immemorial has known, war destroys morals.

Wars also cause revolutions. In fact, as Nisbet points out, "War is by nature revolutionary in its impact upon a people. How could it be otherwise? Its values . . . are antithetical in the extreme to the values of kinship-based society with its consecration of tradition, conventionality, and age or seniority." It was Lenin who claimed that "national wars are virtually made to be turned into revolutions."

The cultural revolution of the 1960 was no exception to this rule. The net result of three major wars within a 20 year span was all too predictable: "moral guidelines are loosened, and the line between good and bad becomes ever more indistinct." The Jacobins of the 1960s became experts "at exploiting war in the name of revolution and revolution in the name of war." Nisbet notes that it was von Clausewitz who "laid down the vital principle that modern war demands a large scale reconstruction of the society that participates in it." The net result of America's involvement in the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was social engineering which changed American society into institutionalized revolution, whose main theoretical framework was the Roman law which made the Roman empire possible. According to those principles,

A sovereign defined as being not under the law but its very source, contract rooted in will or volition in place of ascribed or fixed states, and, far from least, a conception of society composed of atomlike individuals, rather than of impenetrable social groups and associations, that in fact, has proved to be the framework of modern warfare, capitalism, and nationalism.

This meant an end to the pluralism, localism and regionalism which characterized both the Catholic Middle Ages and America during its era as a republic. Instead of man rooted in a community of relationships in a particular place, the permanent revolution which flows from war and finds its expression in social engineering, envisions the state as "an aggregate of individuals bound together only by the ties of contract and the will of the sovereign" and the social order "as a kind of sand heap of legally discrete individual particles."

War, as Nisbet points out, creates community. Or to put it more exactly, it turns *Gemeinschaft* into *Gesellschaft*. Normal communities are replaced by societies organized along quasi-military lines. Hell's Angels corresponded exactly to this pattern. In a deracinated culture where everyone is an individual fending for himself, the military is often the only institution that can bring men together for a common purpose. Since all of "our major values—love, protection, courage, honor, loyalty among them— were all nourished originally in the small contexts of human association: family, neighborhood, small community," they begin to become invisible when those intermediary groups disappear. At moments like this they can only be found in the military and the community that war makes possible. "For individual who find the

search in our large-scale society today for these contexts and values difficult and frustrating, the experience of war and its community known at first hand in the squad or platoon can be memorable." Or they can be found in a quasi-military *Gesellschaft* like the biker gang.

Once again biker culture was both a symptom and a reaction. War turned the *Gemeinschaft* of local communities into the *Gesellschaft* of the military, and the deracinated refuse of that system, knowing inchoately that man is a social animal, created an anti-society which was the mirror image of the military which destroyed his community in the first place.

Bikers recreated the *Gemeinschaft* the war destroyed as the *Gesellschaft* of the outlaw motorcycle gangs. Hell's Angels is a deviant community, based on the inchoate rejection of social engineering, the planned community or suburb, and the corporate ladder, unavailable anyway because of the blue collar status of most bikers. The biker community is also based on the inversion of the military, which is usually the only stable community the uprooted have ever known. Hence, the proliferation of Nazi memorabilia. The biker is going to embrace the symbols he was taught to reject by creating a paramilitary organization dedicated to deviance.

Biker culture is full of military symbols. But they are all deviant. And it is for this reason that they have largely disappeared down the memory hole created by the Harley Davidson Motor Company when they embraced biker culture in the '80s to coopt it and bring it under corporate control.

In his soft-core porn memoir published by Grove Press, Frank Reynolds tried to explain the connection between Nazi symbols, belonging, and deviance as practiced by the Hell's Angels. The Nazi insignia symbolized the racial pride that was now taboo in post-Brown v. Schoolboard America: "People come up to me and ask me why I wear a swastika and why all of us have these German medals and items from the Hitler regime . . . We feel that we are a superior race. The swastika signifies a superior race. We feel we are a superior race. . . . it helps us generate togetherness" (Reynolds, p. 9). Hell's Angels wear Nazi insigniae because they symbolize deviance and togetherness simultaneously. The Angels are *Gesellschaft* as anti-*Gemeinschaft*, and in this regard, as in their consumerism, they are faithful followers of the dominant culture. "Angel mamas," Frank Reynolds informs us, "are nymphomaniacs who will do anything related to sex." Reynolds was articulating in 1965 the feminist vision of femininity three decades before the feminists articulated it. Biker culture was social engineering ahead of its time.

Up until 1969 every one knew that hippies and bikers were two distinct tribes, even if they were co-belligerents in the war on straight society, which at that time had nothing to do with homosexuality. The hippies were leftists and the bikers were fascist losers, something which became apparent when the bikers attacked the hippies at a Get Out of Vietnam rally held on the Oakland-Berkeley border in October 1966. The Left tried to recruit the Hell's Angels into their side of the culture wars but failed because as Thompson put it,

The Angels, like all other motorcycle outlaws, are rigidly anti-Communist. Their political views are limited to the same kind of retrograde patriotism that motivates the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party. They are blind to the irony of their role . . . knight errants of a faith from which they have already been excommunicated. The Angels will be among the first to be locked up or croaked if the politicians they think they agree with ever come to power. (p. 249).

Allen Ginsberg tried to link the Angels to Walt Whitman:

The great image -which all can buy—is your own ideal image—

Whitman's free so, camarado, also of Open Road.

I asking you to be Camarado, friend, kind, lover because vast majority

Of peace marchers

Actually respect & venerate your lonesomeness

& struggle & would rather be peaceful intimates

with you than fearful enraged frightened paranoid enemies hitting each other.

All separate identities are bankrupt-

Square, beat, Jews, Negroes, Hell's Angels, Communist & American.

But anyone could see this attempt was going nowhere. To begin with, deracinated veterans were drawn to gangs like the Angels precisely because those gangs offered "separate identities." Ginsberg's poem, in this regard, has uncanny similarities with the ADL's concurrent attempt to disrupt any ethnic group's identity but its own. The final nail in this coffin got hammered home at the Rolling Stones concert at Altamont in December 1969, when the Hell's Angels who got hired as security guards clubbed hippies with pool cues and ended up stabbing to death one of the few blacks in attendance. The real subversion of the Angel's separate identity and its conflation with the hippies they hated did take place in 1969 with the premiere of *Easy Rider*.

*Easy Rider* is hands-down the dopyest movie ever made, but it did succeed as an act of co-optation and subversion by conflating hippies and bikers in the public mind. Peter Fonda's helmet is the most important icon in *Easy Rider*. If Dennis Hopper and Hollywood had been interested in *cinema verite*, both he and Peter Fonda should have been wearing Nazi Wehrmacht helmets because that was the uniform of the day. Hell's Angels loved Nazi memorabilia. The only thing more popular than the Nazi helmet was the Iron Cross. If there were one symbol of the outlaw biker gang it was the iron cross. *Easy Rider* changed all that; it was an ominous sign because it showed how easily bike culture could be manipulated and brought under control and how the protest at its heart would be determined not by the people from whom the protest arose but by the culture which took control of its interpretation.

There were violent protests against social engineering in the ethnic neighborhoods of Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, but the bikers were *ipso facto*, not part of that protest. Because they had remained in California, the bikers were *hors de combat*. In keeping with the essence of biker culture as both symptom of and reaction to the militarization of American culture, the bohemian protest of bikers and beats invariably manifested itself as aggressive rootlessness, symbolized by the automobile in Jack Kerouac's Novel *On the Road*, which took place in 1947, and aggression against the family, which clueless beatniks saw as the engine of oppression since they were unaware of social engineering. This error in ascribing proper causality coupled with the divisive and isolating consequences of sexual immorality set up the dynamic of co-optation which would eventually triumph over biker culture

Initially, however, the inchoate protest biker culture represented was prohibited by the dominant culture. Harley Davidson wanted to have nothing to do with Hell's Angels. The American Motorcycle Association responded to the publicity surrounding the Hollister riot by saying that 99 percent of all motorcycle riders were law-abiding citizens, prompting Hell's Angels to wear 1 % patches as part of their uniform.

America, however, never really felt comfortable with the idea of social engineering, and as it became more repugnant in the average American's eyes, Hell's Angels began to take on the aura of outlaw heroes. Burdened by increasingly onerous burdens of social control, the average, which is to say, clueless socially engineered citizen became increasingly fascinated by deviance, which he incorrectly saw as the antithesis of and antidote to social control. Eventually the dominant culture exploited this fascination as it developed even more sophisticated form of control based on the arousal of sexual passion.

### **Cannon Fodder**

Re jected by the community that had used them as cannon fodder and then spurned them as low-class losers, the bikers created the equivalent of the loser's table in the high school lunch room. They deliberately and defiantly espoused all of the traits which made them unattractive in the eyes of the

dominant culture. If the culture was obsessed with being neat and clean, they would take pride in being slovenly and dirty. If the culture took pride in defeating fascism, the bikers would proudly wear the iron cross, the swastika and the Wehrmacht helmet of the Germans they had defeated.

The crucial issue became morals because unwittingly the bikers' espousal of bohemian antimoralism opened the door for the subversion of group identity. If the dominant culture believed in marriage, the bikers believed in rape and misogyny. The biker gangs were cesspools of misogyny, created by men who had abandoned their families, or were too morally corrupted or fearful to create them in the first place. Sexual deviance set up dynamic which would ultimately lead to the subversion of the biker culture and the reason it was created. Freewheelin' Frank joined the Angels after he abandoned his wife and children, explaining that "my bike has replaced a woman in the sense of love for something near" (p. 90).

it was the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of July, the year of 1965. I had just left Reno, Nevada—and behind me a wife and child. My mind was very young in youth and torn and mixed up. I'd been an expensive parasite and had not known it really, and I had come back to the Hell's Angels. My mind wandered, I had no feeling of security, my road was suicide. I had attempted it in Reno . . . (p. 76).

I was going to leave San Francisco and go with them into the land of Reno, Nevada, in order to stay away from my people, who do not mix with the lines of society and marriage and wife and children. It was a heartbreaking compromise, and my choice would not be the same today. For I deeply fear women and in turn my love is for the mechanical motorcycle that cannot be compared to any other motorcycle or any other mechanical object. As I said, in the end my lover turned into Delilah. I was ridded from the land of Reno by the law. Directed off by a psychiatrist—never to come back again. Force away from the child and woman forever. I went back to the land of my people in San Francisco and they took me back (p. 93).

Reynolds refers to marriage "and society's pliers of raising kids" as "the almost impossible kind of life that is set up for you" without asking who or what had made it impossible. Sensing that his passion inflamed mind will never get to the bottom of this issue, Reynolds abandons the family for the *Gesellschaft* of the biker gang and blames women for his defection. "We both lost our place as Hell's Angels because of a woman—but we made it back. Most of the men don't ever make it back. . . . Our biggest downfall is women. . . . We're trying to teach our women to be more of a Bohemian contact to get on trip of taking care of children and keeping their mouths shut—to keep their hair brushed out an long and straight. . . . It's our job to hold the sword. The woman is there to bear our children and that's all." Needless to say, Freewheelin' Frank was going to get no support from the social engineers or their feminist auxiliary with views like these. The social engineers wanted labor mobility; they wanted to drive down wages by doubling the work force by integrating women into it, and the feminists were only too happy to collaborate. As a result, the biker protest against the things it didn't understand turned on the people nearest to it and began blaming the victim. It was similar to the Catholic ethnics fighting the migrants from Mississippi in Chicago; both groups unaware of who had enabled the migration that was the cause of the fighting. In spite of momentary insights—"We don't fit into the production lines"—the whole issue was just too damned complicated to figure out, and so the Angels became beasts to escape the burden of acting like men.

The motorcycle would henceforth become the symbol of how you had ruined your life but didn't care anymore. Hollywood found the sexual degeneracy of the biker gangs irresistible. In 1965 Hollywood broke the production code. In 1965 the Supreme Court decriminalized the sale of contraceptives in *Griswold vs. Connecticut*. It was the age of ghetto riots, and the sexual revolution. Nineteen sixty-five was also the year in which the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek* created the Hell's Angels as a symbol of sexual deviance. In a section of his book entitled "The Making of the Menace, 1965," Hunter Thompson describes how the Hell's Angels were reappropriated by the culture which had spurned them in 1953:

The Angels seemed headed for obscurity once again, but the tide was turned by a *New York Times* correspondent in Los Angeles, who filed a lengthy and lurid commentary on the Lynch Report. . . . *Time* followed with a left hook titled "the Wilder Ones." *Newsweek* crossed with a right, titled "The Wild One." And by the time the dust had settled the national news media had a guaranteed grabber on their hands. It was sex, violence, crime, craziness, and filth—all in one package. (p. 25). . . . The Hell's Angels as they exist today were virtually created by *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times*. (p. 36).

The Angels become famous as a rape fantasy, even though the charges that were the basis of the fantasy were dropped. The fact that *Time* and *Newsweek* continued with the story took on a meaning of its own. The Establishment was in the process of redefining deviance, specifically sexual deviance. Contraception was a big part of this. It would solve the race problem and the Catholic problem simultaneously. It would also become the most effective form of social engineering this country would ever know. One of the great achievements of George W. Bush was trashing this system in favor of military imperialism, a sin for which Hollywood Jews would hold him forever responsible. The bikers, most of whom were veterans anyway, were drafted once again to be deployed as the *lumpeproletariat* in the opening phase of the culture wars of the 1960s. Their role now was to act, as Thompson put it, as an "instrument of Anarchy, a tool of defiance, and even a weapon" (p. 91). A weapon in the culture wars. They became a standing incitement to sexual deviance at precisely the time that the ruling class wanted to promote deviance as a form of control. Beginning in 1969, the Angels would not have to worry about being stopped by the California Highway Patrol.

They were now the saints of a sensate culture, and, as Mick Jagger would put it at around the same time, in sensate culture "every cop is a criminal" and all of the criminals are saints. The world had been turned upside down, which is another word for revolution. The biker had become a culturally accepted form of deviance. Hollywood's infatuation with biker culture deepened when they realized in Thompson's words, that bikers were "acting out the daydreams of millions of losers who don't wear any defiant insignia and who don't know how to be outlaws" (p. 266). In a world of almost total deracination, visible identification with a group had become a valuable commodity, too valuable to be left to amateurs who didn't know how to market it properly.

Sexual license would prove to be the undoing not only of American culture but of all of the vulnerable subcultures within it, including the biker subculture, which would be co-opted and transformed into a form of social control. The crucial middle term in this transformation is narcissism, which always substitutes the illusion of power for the reality of control. Veterans became bikers because they were bewildered by the culture which rejected them as losers and because they ruined their own lives by rejecting matrimony. The biker was always on the verge of despair that came from knowing that he was a total loser in the world's eyes and that he had messed up his life in his own eyes as well. The motorcycle gave bikers the illusion of power, which is always attractive to the impotent. One of the Rebels Wolf studied explained to him that "When I'm on my bike, I feel good. I feel free. It's just me and my bike, two against the world. You know the freedom. You get 700 pounds of hot throbbing iron between your legs . . . when I twist open that throttle I know she's going somewhere" (p. 50). Wolf then proffers the following explanation of the attraction which "700 pounds of throbbing metal between my legs" holds for the biker:

Wolf then proffers the following explanation of the attraction which "700 pounds of throbbing metal between my legs" holds for the biker: "If the biker feels that he has been used, manipulated, or twisted by some institution, the motorcycle will return to him a sense of strength and potency."

Put another way, the motorcycle, by giving the biker the illusion of power, insures that he will never deal with the real issues that are causing him to feel "used, manipulated, or twisted by some institution." The motorcycle guarantees that the biker will never figure out who or what has been pushing his buttons. Wolf remains oblivious to all this and in the end remains incapable of reading his own text: "This ability to transcend one's immediate circumstances," he writes, "is the essence of hope. The sensation of controlled power helps silence inner doubts; it works against a self-image of being a passive functionary whose life is a matter of fate or circumstance." The motorcycle, in other words, inures its victim against the kind of passive suffering symbolized by the cross which is the basis for Christianity and any effective antidote to the culture of *libido dominandi*. "Controlling power," Wolf continues, "encourages people to believe that they are the key to cause and effect and to take full responsibility for their lives; this is the key to effective decision making in life. By itself riding is an elixir that the biker uses to change the base metal of life into gold." The motorcycle, in other words, offers a kind of narcissistic magic to the culture's losers. It ensures that whatever associations they form will be ultimately impotent and easy for co-optation by those who know how to manipulate the symbols of narcissistic magic. All of this is lost on Wolf: "Simply by engaging in an activity that he feels is 'the real me,' the biker makes a statement about his being an individual who has the freedom to choose his own destiny. This is the psychological core of those elusive and hard to define sensations that a biker will sometimes refer to as 'two-wheeled freedom.'"

No one has "the freedom to chose his own destiny." Two-wheeled Freedom is another word for narcissism, which always offers the reality of bondage under the illusion of power. Bikers became blinded by their own illusions, and when that happened their protest became ripe for the picking of anyone sophisticated enough to know how to manipulate their passions and control them. The motorcycle became, as a result, one of many escape valves which the culture tolerates in order to keep the masses under control. When Wolf quotes Wee Albert, who claims, "If it weren't for my hog, I'd probably go insane," he fails to see that if all of the Wee Alberts got off of their bikes and pondered for a moment the forces that drove them to biking for release, they might be able to first understand and then circumvent the social structures that have been created to control them. The narcissism which flows from 700 pounds of throbbing metal between their legs insures, however, that that will never happen. Wolf goes on to define an outlaw biker as



a man who feels that he has been cheated, used or denied by society. He comes to view riding as an act of liberating defiance that removes, or at least temporarily suspends, the mass-conditioned repressions that patterned his parents and threaten to curb his impulse toward freedom and pleasure (p. 52).

What Wolf fails to see is that the motorcycle, far from being an instrument of "liberating defiance," is actually an instrument of control. Even if Wolf couldn't see that fact, other people could, and it paved the way for the total co-optation of biker culture when Harley Davidson got into the business of social engineering in the 1980s.

By the time *Easy Rider* appeared on the silver screen in 1969, the Harley Davidson Motor Company, as the only American motorcycle manufacturer, had been on the receiving end of a ten-year-long beating at the hands of Honda, Yamaha, and Suzuki, the major manufacturers of Japanese motorcycles. The Japanese started out at the low end of the market in 1959, producing bikes with 50 and 90 cc engines. Then in the late '70s, the Japanese decided to contest Harley on its own turf when Honda introduced the Honda Gold Wing, a 1000 cc big bike that was cheaper and ran better than the leaky and temperamental Harleys with their 74 cubic inch V 2 engines. As if that weren't bad enough, the challenge came when Harleys were being manufactured by the American Manufacturing and Foundry, a company known best for the manufacture of pin setting machines in bowling alleys.

Eventually a group of executives and mechanics who were only interested in producing motorcycles bought Harley from AMF, and, with help from the Reagan administration, which slapped a tariff on big Japanese bikes, pulled off one of the great comebacks in the history of American manufacturing. That comeback required the implementation of new management techniques (all of which were borrowed from the Japanese, at the same time the company was encouraging Harley riders to drop Japanese bikes from cranes, demolish them with sledgehammers, etc.), the development of a new engine, the Evolution engine, which leaked less oil and broke down less frequently than the Knuckleheads, Panheads, and Shovelheads of years gone by.

But the most important thing that Harley did was to get into the identity business, when it embraced the biker image which it had previously shunned by creating HOG (the Harley Owner's Group) in 1983. Honda was the first motorcycle company to deal with the biker image, and Honda dealt with the image by running in the opposite direction. "You meet the nicest people on a Honda," was not the best characterization of the clientele that took part in the Hollister riot of 1947. Nor did it spring to mind as you watched Sonny Barger and the Oakland branch of the Hell's angels ride their motorcycles over naked, squealing hippies on their way to the stage at the Rolling Stones concert at Altamont. But it sold a lot of small engine bikes to the babyboomers in the '60s.

Twenty years later, the babyboomers were still around, but the world had changed. The elites had redefined deviance; suddenly the yearly bacchanals at Sturgis, Daytona, and Piercy, California seemed as American as, well, Woodstock. Dennis Hopper had put an American flag on Peter Fonda's helmet, instead of the swastika on the chrome Wehrmacht helmet he should have been wearing.

What was up was now down, and what was down was now up, which is another word for what happens during a revolution. Deviance had been redefined, and in terms of biker culture, the major instrument for its redefinition was HOG. HOG was to biker culture what political correctness and speech codes were to college campuses at around the same time. HOG was social engineering, privatized to fit into the ethos of the Reagan administration. By creating HOG, Harley Davidson finally embraced the deviant biker culture which it had been shunning since the Hollister riot of 1947. Gone were the Nazi memorabilia which were one of the main hallmarks of the biker culture of the '60s. The classic biker back then rode a Triumph and wore a chromed Wehrmacht helmet. If he did not have an Iron Cross on his jacket, he was considered some kind of imposter. Take a look at photos of Sturgis or Bike Week at Daytona at any time after 1990 and you will look in vain for Nazi helmets, chromed or otherwise, or iron crosses or, God forbid, the swastikas that Hunter Thompson saw in California in 1965. By creating HOG, Harley realized that the only way they could beat the Japanese was by creating an antidote to the deracination which had driven World War II and Vietnam veterans to embrace biker culture in the first place.

By creating HOG, Harley Davidson put corporate America's seal of approval on the deviant community. HOG was a consumer group that gave all of the benefits of ethnic identification—clothing, patriotism, belonging, etc.— along with the right to engage in sexual excess. In short, HOG embodied the ideals of American culture as redefined by the social engineers in the period following World War II. America now meant sexual degeneracy, no children, impulsive buying habits, disposable income spent on expensive status-conferring consumer items, narcissism, and, most important of all, the illusion of freedom spraypainted over the reality of control. It wasn't so much that bikers had become respectable Americans, as it was that Americans in general and the babyboomers in particular had all become Hell's Angels.

Harley Culture meant identity and friends in an increasingly opaque and unfriendly world, something

biker publisher Reg Kittrelle considers "an important plus" because "there has been an ever-increasing disfranchising of the population. Individuals feel pretty distant from their government and they were looking for things to identify with. Everyone wants an identity. It's pretty much lost in most people's work places. None of us feel that we have much voice in government. The vote doesn't count. So people look around and say, 'What am I? How do I count as an individual?'" (Joans, p. 43).

Motorcycles always conferred an identity on people who considered themselves losers. What has changed since the Hollister Riot of '47 is the size of the loser pool. Now since everyone can buy into HOG, everyone must be a potential loser. Even yuppies, who as yuppies are "upwardly mobile," the criterion for success in America, now have the identity vacuum that marketers love to fill.

The creation of HOG also heralded the arrival of a new breed of biker, the RUB, or rich urban biker. Once they get to a place like Sturgis the Yuppie Bikers tend to blend in because of their assiduous cultivation of biker fashion, but with a little effort you can still pick them out in a crowd. The absence of gray facial hair is one give away. The absence of prosthetic limbs is another, as well as the presence of temporary tattoos. But the yuppie bikers are most easily recognized en route, as we noticed while puttering along at our Conestoga Wagon pace of 50 miles per hour when three Class A Motorhomes with Harley trailers and New York license plates roared past us on Interstate 90. This was a sign that the investment banker bikers from Manhattan were hightailin' it to the Buffalo Chip campground to get their front row seats for the wet T-shirt contest. It could have been a scene out of *Wild Hogs*, the final film in the trilogy of biker movies, the one that brings down the curtain on the movement that began as protest and ended up as a marketing strategy.

Most commentators mention Harley's creation of HOG in 1983 in the hushed terms reserved for high-wire financial deals of the sort that landed Michael Miliken in jail. Anthropologist Barbara Joans spent years learning how to ride a motorcycle before she wrote *Bike Lust*, her study of biker culture. (Let's hope she never decides to study suttee.) She refers to the creation of HOG as "pure brilliance" because

With the formation of HOG, Harley is now selling more than bikes; they are selling the H-D experience. HOG, the only official Harley-Davidson group backed by the corporation, provides social and riding activities all over the country. HOG has turned motorcycling into a respectable way of life. . . . Buying a Harley has become more than buying a product. Customers are now offered a ready-made community to join. The community is laced with patriotism. The nationwide network gives riders the feeling that they are joining with other American riders in supporting the country. They are buying an American product and keeping the economy strong (Barbara Joans, *Bike Lust: Harleys, Women, and American Society* [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001])

Professor Barbara Joans is an anthropologist who teaches at Merritt College in San Francisco. She is also part of the Extraterrestrial Intelligence Project. When not waiting to hear from E.T, she hangs around biker bars and Harley dealerships in San Francisco, where she has become an expert, in her own words, in destroying the culture you wish to join. This comes naturally to Professor Joans because she is a New York Jew:

The only problem is that I am a New York Jew [problem? Is this a problem?], reared in the streets of Manhattan and the side streets of Brooklyn, and I had been born to read books not ride bikes. Being sedentary, sickly, utterly nonmechanically inclined and a lover of the great indoors, I am more suited to appreciate museums than motorcycles. I am used to corridors and carpets, not canyons and woodlands. (pp. 182-3).

The problem Professor Joans refers to here can best be summed up by saying that she really doesn't like riding motorcycles.

My entire past city life of university teaching, child rearing, poetry writing, piano playing and radical activism left me utterly unprepared for the glory and godawfulness of riding the wind. Only my innate fanaticism prepared me for riding. I had been, in mind-numbing order, a fifties beatnik, a sixties civil rights, radical politics, antiwar, hippie (urban not rural); and an eighties down and dirty, fast field professional anthropologist. It was revolution, sex, dope, and rock and roll all the way. . . . My profile, at the start of this work, would have read urban intellectual and cultural cynic, as well as loudmouthed troublemaker. (p. 184).

Professor Joans is, in other words, a Jewish revolutionary of the sort that was common in the '60s, who doesn't really like riding motorcycles or the type of people who ride them. Instead of just leaving it at that and keeping busy by reading Franz Boas, Joans the revolutionary feels duty bound to reform the redneck bikers she hates. She knows that she doesn't really belong but rather than start her own club she decides to wreck their club by making it more inclusive, i.e., by destroying the reason it came into existence in the first place by importing women and homosexuals into its ranks. Confronted by a biker club in rural California where women don't ride, or ruin the men's ride by insisting that they keep their speed below 35 mph, Professor Joans

realized with envy that I would never belong to a group that had that much female solidarity. These women rode in a universe far more ordered than mine. These women knew their place. It was a place of strength, courage, and power, but it was a gender-specific place. They share the bid and club with their husbands and both accepted their complementary roles. . . . Their behaviors were defined by club rules, by community standards and by church affiliation. It worked. They had a good thing going and they all knew it. Unfortunately for me, it was their thing, and, appealing as it was, I was not willing to join a small society with relatively rigid roles, no matter how emotionally gratifying the payoff.

Rather than confront her own Jewish hatred of logos, Professor Joans decides to confront the group instead and inform them that they are not allowed to break up an antiwar rally. The thing that made this chutzpah seem conceivable and anything less than suicidal was HOG and Harley's involvement in social engineering:

Even though I was a guest at that club, I was a Harley rider. Having ridden in on my own Sportster, I felt qualified to talk. The chairman was polite enough to acknowledge me before he firmly called me out of order. [But in spite of all that] I had to prevent the group from going downtown. Luckily for me, one of the few members I knew grabbed me off my bike. "Are you crazy?"

No, Professor Joans is, as she said, just a New York Jew, an entitlement in our culture which allows the possessor to tell other people what to think and how to run their lives. Professor Joans, as the culturally entitled Jew, is determined to turn the motorcycle into her kind of deviance, which involves riding with the Dykes on Bikes at San Francisco's annual Gay Pride Parade. Professor Joans likes Dykes on Bikes because she sees them as "an incredible mix of strength, sexuality and rule breaking." (p. 200).

As if to show that even professors have pensive moments, Professor Joans wonders at one point whether "the new riders are unwittingly destroying the very culture they wish to join. By their entrance into the biker world, they are changing the rules. They have not given their souls to riding. It is not their life. They are weekend warriors" (p. 207).

After admitting that she is a dilettante, Professor Joans still feels that she has the right to set the rules for the biker clubs she is in effect subverting. Men created this club so that they could ride fast, but Professor Joans has no compunction in denouncing a group of bikers who didn't want to travel at the 35 mph she preferred, as "shits." Professor Joans also has no compunction in denouncing a biker for their racism, even though "separate identity" is the only reason this (or any other) club was created in the first place. Women bikers are equally ungrateful because they don't want to emulate "the early feminists whom so many women bikers wish to distance themselves from, helped pave the way for today's riders" (p. 150). They too get an earful from Professor Joans, who informs them in no uncertain terms that "If my entire generation of feminists hadn't been such hard-nosed, hard-assed, hard-working, civil rights pushing, abortion rights gaining, humorless bitches, there would be damn fewer women in the wind today."

Just why that would be tragic is something Professor Joans never explains. It's one of many things Professor Joans never explains in her book, like why she would want to hang around with a bunch of fat losers drinking Jack Daniels sitting on plastic chairs in a parking lot in, say, Carson City, Nevada when she could be at home savoring the prose of Ruth Benedict. Just why does Professor Joans enjoy partying with men who are

Overweight and underfit, the men of this hard-living culture push their pleasures to excess. Avoidance of pain and promotion of pleasure is a far more accurate description of the goals of this group than is the deferred gratification of the golden mean. The men will eat, drink, and screw as much as possible. When they can. (p. 163).

The short answer to this question is community. Professor Joans is starved for community because she is just as deracinated as everyone else.

This is a community that crosses economic, class, race and gender lines. The bike, as symbol, icon, transportation, and greatly loved machine permits us to cross those lines. The bike provides the solidarity glue that cements us as a community. . . . the shared language that brings us together. The bike brings us together. Without it some of us would remain friends. But without it, most of us would fragment into our separate worlds. The extraordinary strength of the bike lies in its ability to forge a community out of disparate folk and keep it going.

If Steinbeck should have stayed in California and never gone to New York, the exact opposite is true of Professor Joans. She should have stayed in New York and left the California bikers alone.

When the Harley-Davidson company got into social engineering, they also redefined the family. Freewheelin' Frank Reynolds joined Hell's Angels as an escape from the family he abandoned in 1965. Now when you buy a motorcycle, you "join the Harley family." But there are other options for those who don't have \$20,000 to spend as a down payment on future repair and medical bills. You can become the Harley equivalent of "poor relations" and join the Harley family on the cheap, as Professor Joans points out:

You don't need to ride a bike (or even own a bike) to join the Harley family. The dealerships sell an impressive line of new Harley products—from functional and protective road gear to household goods. Go to the shops and check out the baby clothes, sleeping attire, wine, watches, pocketknives, Tiffany-style lamp shades, and shaving mugs. From blankets to bibs, the H-D logo is likely to show up everywhere. It even appears on jukeboxes and cigarettes.

When you buy a Harley, you buy "the whole Harley experience," which means that "At 7:00 PM, far from home, when the bike has broken down and both rider and wife sore and hungry, it helps to know that the closest dealership will offer assistance."

Harley redefined the family by turning it into a consumer subculture. This was especially appealing to a cohort which had annihilated their real families during the carnage of the sexual revolution and, now faced with the inescapable conclusion that they had ruined their lives, needed to make a U-turn to get out of Memory Lane:

Belonging to the Harley family is one of Harley's strongest selling points. Once in the family, if you break down, there is someone to help you in every town across the country. The rider, especially the long distance rider, is no longer riding alone. Dealerships offer services that reinforce customer loyalty. Milwaukee has hit upon marketing magic. It is somewhat ironic that the image of the independent biker riding alone down the lonely country lane is, in reality, backed by a national network of dealerships. Independence may look and feel good, but every Harley rider knows that breakdowns on isolated roads are no fun (Joans, p. 32).

After redefining the family, Harley redefined America. "Riding can also be seen as an extension of the frontier. It's an iron horse. And Harleys are as American as mom and apple pie. Harleys carry on a tradition. There is that streak of independence in all of us. And a little bit of recklessness too. Kind of like, if the world gets too close, you can say, 'Screw it, I'm getting on my bike. Goodbye.'"

In addition to the America stuff, owning a Harley means control of destiny:

Riding a Harley provides an outlet. Now the rider is in control of his own destiny. Gone is the remoteness of modern life. If the rider makes a mistake on the bike, he's going to pay for it. There is the satisfaction of knowing that the rider has made some decision concerning what he does with his time and his life. . . . When a whole bunch of people are riding on Harleys together, riding the actual bike is secondary. What is primary is that it gives the rider an identity and a group of friends to ride with. These are people he might otherwise not have befriended. (Joans, p. 45).

Secure in his identity and in control of his destiny, the HOG member can now tell the world: "'Take me or leave me.' For better or for worse, this is who I am. It also represents for me my love of my country. I'm putting my country up there and supporting it. I can't get satisfaction out of the government, but I can still support and love my country. It also allows you to choose your own statement. It sets you apart." (Joans, p. 46).

Not everyone is as uncritically enthusiastic as Professor Joans about what has happened to biker culture after HOG took it over. Some people feel that HOG has destroyed biker culture by making it inclusive. Even Professor Joans, in one of her few reflective moments, entertains the notion that people like her may have destroyed the subculture they wanted so avidly to join. No one, however, claims that biker culture is what it once was. Roby Page, unlike Professor Joans, mourns its passing and its transformation.

A generation ago it would have been possible . . . to generalize about the biker subculture as a predominantly white, male-driven, working-class-based, individualistic group. This was the subculture of individualism, patriotism, and machismo identified by Schouten and McAlexander. The arrival of the new bikers has altered this characterization, making the biker culture much more heterogeneous. (Roby Page, *Bike Week at Daytona* [Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005], p. 122.)

In their 1995 analysis of biker culture, John W. Schouten and James H. McAlexander refer to "Harley World" as a "subculture of consumption," by which they mean "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity." (John W. Schouten and James H. McAlexander, "Subcultures of Consumption: an Ethnography of the New Bikers," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 [1995]: 43-61, cited in Page).

Page also cites Juliet B. Schor who claims that "It is now widely believed that consumer goods provide an opportunity for people to express themselves, display their identities, or create a public persona. . . . Who we are not only affects what we buy. What we buy also affects who we become." But he fails to note that the need to buy an identity has its source elsewhere in other pathologies. Healthy people in healthy cultures do not feel the need to buy an identity. Only empty people in empty cultures feel that need. The unspoken truth here is that the malaise which struck the blue-collar veterans returning from World War II has now spread to the offspring of the white collar veterans who made it back via the GI Bill and FHA housing loans. Successful yuppie babyboomers now have the same lack of identity that the poor white trash their parents spurned in the '50s had.

Just as the babyboomers got herded like sheep into the sexual revolution of the '60s, buying Beatles records, birth control pills, and Honda 90s, they got herded into the Harley revival of the 1990s because of the same ego needs. They still don't know what is going on, or as Schouten and McAlexander put it: "Because the newcomer is ignorant of many nuances of biker culture, his or her socialization may be facilitated opportunistically by marketing efforts. . . . This socialization process has the effect of molding the malleable perceptions of the new biker toward an acceptance of the corporate vision of bikerdom and of creating customers for official H-D clothing and accessories."

## **Hula Hoop**

The babyboomers, who made the inventors of the hula hoop rich, got suckered into one more fad, and "the old biker subculture has been co-opted by elements of mainstream society."

The 1983 organization (and trademarking) of HOG was another step in the co-optation of biker culture. "It was formed in part to counteract the dissident Harley Davidson Owners Association and in part to coalesce new customers," according to Yates. "This involved a radical turnabout in policy in that the heretofore pejorative 'hog' was embraced as a self-effacing, irreverent corporate nickname." The Invasion of the Body-Snatcher scenario, in other words, happened in just about every subculture worth colonizing, from Notre Dame to NASCAR.

The task when it came to the co-optation of biker culture, as Schouten and McAlexander put it, was "to expropriate certain symbols of the outlaw subculture and employ the product design and advertising components of the fashion system in order to redefine their meanings just enough to make them palatable to a broader group of consumers. . . . Harley-Davidson has co-opted important symbols and structural aspects of the outlaw subculture, sanitized or softened them, and given them more socially acceptable meanings."

Of course, excessive co-optation risks destroying the very qualities that initially make the subculture so appealing. "As membership in the subculture becomes more and more accessible and acceptable to mainstream consumers, and as more mainstream consumers begin to don the trappings of bikers, lines of marginality become blurred and some of the distinctiveness of the biker subculture is lost," Schouten and McAlexander observe.

Not everyone is happy with HOG or Harley's marketing strategy. The old time bikers who handed on the trappings of biker culture only to have them co-opted refer to the Harley Davidson Motor Company as the "MoFoCo," whose "stealerships" favor the upscale yuppies who appropriated their symbols. This means, according to Schouten and McAlexander, that Harley Davidson, "is faced with a veritable tightrope walk between the conflicting needs of two disparate but equally important groups of consumers: those who give the product its mystique and those who give the company its profitability."

In America profitability wins out over mystique every time. What began as a protest against social engineering was absorbed by the very social engineering it sought to avoid. Harley World triumphed over biker culture, something the old-timers noticed with dismay:

"Daytona," one biker noted in an on-line chat room, "has become a regular fuckin' motorcycle Disneyland, which is why I don't go anymore." Page finds this criticism "prescient," especially "when considering the growth possibilities of a new Orlando Bike Week in the shadow of Disney World. Indeed, Bike Week often does look like a fantastic theme park, one where bikers, poseurs, and nonbikers alike come to sample a commercialized version of biker culture and revel in the carnival-like atmosphere. Call it Biker World."

The word "World" attached to something like a motorcycle is the sign that what started off as a protest ended up as a theme park. It is a sign that something got co-opted. If Harley World is now a reality, can Notre Dame World be far behind? What about America World? The nation that became a theme park. Is it possible anymore to tell the difference between America World and America?

### **Chapter 3: Friday, August 3**

Steinbeck loved Montana and as part of his homage to that state he made a pilgrimage to the Little Big Horn Battlefield, where General George Custer died along with hundreds of his men.

Steinbeck and his dog Charley wanted to "pay our respects to General Custer and Sitting Bull on the battlefield of Little Big Horn. I don't suppose there is an American who doesn't carry Remington's painting of the last defense off the center column of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry in his head. I removed my hat in memory of brave men, and Charley saluted in his own manner but I thought with great respect."

Peter and I arrived at the Little Big Horn after a whole morning's drive over 212, the short cut that eliminates 70 miles from Interstate 90 and takes us through an endless sea of grass and two Indian reservations. You can tell that you've entered Indian territory because the architecture goes from bad to worse. Instead of 19<sup>th</sup> century wooden balloon frame buildings, you see mobile homes surrounded by junked cars.

Little Big Horn is where General George Custer held his famous last stand. Like Steinbeck, I was familiar with Remington's painting of Custer's Last Charge, where the general is mounted on his horse, brandishing his saber, charging at three demoralized Indians. Needless to say, if this were an accurate presentation of what happened, Custer wouldn't be buried in South Dakota, with 600 of his troops.

Instead of mounting a cavalry charge against the Indians, Custer ordered his men to shoot their own horses and hide behind them as protection against the bullets of the Indians. The cavalry's dead horses, unfortunately, provided no protection against Indian arrows, which rained down on the US troops like primitive mortar fire for that entire day in the early summer of 1875. When the bodies were discovered a few days later, they looked like porcupines, so many arrows were sticking out of them.

The audience which listened raptly to the park ranger's account of Custer's last stand was filled with bikers on their way to Sturgis. The parking lot was filled with Harleys, some of which flew the black and white POW-MIA flag which indicated that the owner was a Vietnam veteran.

The park ranger who explained the battle to us tried to put a positive spin on Custer's death, but the fact remains that what Custer did was militarily indefensible. It was also morally indefensible. He divided his forces, sending one group into the Indian village at the river at the bottom of the hill to massacre women and children, but in doing that Custer also allowed his own forces to be cut off and massacred by the enraged Indians. Just why a seasoned Civil War general would do something this stupid and wicked is difficult to explain. Custer was known for his daring during the Civil War. Now faced with a group of primitive people armed with technologically inferior weapons, Custer allowed daring to turn into arrogance and arrogance into hubris, and hubris led to defeat.

Custer's mission was to persuade the Indians to return to their reservation. His men did this by firing indiscriminately into the teepees of the Indians they were sent to persuade, killing women and children in the process. Crazy Horse, like Francis Drake, refused to rush into battle. He was busy being prayed over

by the medicine man whose charms would make him invisible and invincible. The charms must have worked. Crazy Horse rode directly in front of Custer's lines three times and escaped unscathed. It was then that the Indians mounted their counter attack.

It is difficult not to conclude that Custer was a victim of the myth of technological superiority. The myth of racial superiority probably also played a role. If so, Little Big Horn was a warning that got ignored. It was a prelude to Vietnam, which was a prelude to Iraq. The rifles Custer's men carried were technologically superior to the bow and arrow, but in the end that didn't matter because of the circumstances of the battle. The F-16 is technologically superior to the Iraqi car bomb, but so what? The F-16 is also helpless against it.

The high plains are the ideal place to ride a motorcycle—in the summertime, at least. The sky over Sturgis was blue when we left the redneck biker bacchanal, but when we entered Montana the weather changed almost imperceptibly. At first the sky seemed overcast, as if we are heading into rain, but as the sun sank deeper and turned redder, it became clear that what seemed at first glance to be clouds were in fact smoke. All of Montana around I-90 was on fire and we were heading into the heart of the fire, or better still, into the heart of darkness.

Steinbeck claimed that "from start to finish" he "found no strangers" on his quest in search of America. He found only Americans, who in spite of "all of our enormous geographical range, for all of our sectionalism, for all of our interwoven breeds drawn from every part of the ethnic world, . . . are a nation, a new breed. . . . Americans from all sections and of all racial extractions are more alike than the Welsh are like the English" (Charley, p. 160). "The American identity," Steinbeck concludes, "is an exact and provable thing."

But as Steinbeck drove across Texas toward the Old South, the tone of his narrative changed. Unlike the rest of the country, the South, he tells us, "is in the pain of labor and the nature of its future child is still unknown." As a result, Steinbeck "faced the South with dread.

Steinbeck's narrative in search of America undergoes a change of genre once he crosses the border from Texas into Louisiana. What began as an American Picaresque *Don Quixote* is suddenly transformed into *The Heart of Darkness*. By the time he reached the South, Steinbeck's RV has become the symbol of deracinated America, and deracinated America has become the only legitimate America according to the elite for which Steinbeck had been writing propaganda for the past 20 years. So the RV has become the synagogue of acceptable opinions, and Steinbeck has become their rabbi, the man who passes judgment on the legitimacy of Americans, and expels anyone who comes up with ideas that do not pass muster as "American."

At this point it should be obvious that the prime candidates to get hauled before Steinbeck's rolling Committee on Un-American Activities are the Southerners who disagree with the form of social engineering that was being inflicted on them at the time, otherwise known as de-segregation. Steinbeck reports on a group of Louisiana women, known as "the Cheerleaders," who are unhappy with the desegregation of their schools and expressed their unhappiness in the following way:

No newspaper had printed the words these women shouted.

But now I heard the words, bestial and filthy and degenerate. In a long an unprotected life, I have seen and heard the vomitings of demoniac humans before. Why then did these screams fill me with a shocked and sickened sorrow?. . . These blowzy women with their little hates and their clippings hungered for attention These were not mothers, not even women. They were crazy actors playing to a crazy audience (Charley, p. 195).

Then Steinbeck runs into the cab driver who tells him that "them goddamn New York Jews come in and stir the niggers up." Then Steinbeck picks up a cracker hitchhiker, who tells him he sounds like a "Commie nigger lover."

At this point, *Travels with Charley* reaches its climax. Unlike Will Rogers, Steinbeck has finally found an American whom he does not like, and he loses no time in expelling him from the RV which has become the symbol of deracinated America. "Get out," Steinbeck says in his best tough guy manner. When the cracker hesitates, Steinbeck reaches for a non-existent gun, and the redneck scurries off—"In the mirror I saw his hating face and his open spit-ringed mouth"— forcing Steinbeck to conclude in his macho way, "I guess when they're drafting peacemakers they'd better pass me by" (Charley, p. 206). A short ways down the road, the cracker with the hating face and spit-ringed mouth is replaced in the RV which has become the rolling synagogue of acceptable American opinions by "a young Negro student . . . a passionate and

articulate young man with anxiety and fierceness just below the surface, who tells Steinbeck, "I want to see it—me—not dead. Here! Me! I want to see it –soon." At this point the passionate and articulate Negro wipes the tears from his eyes and "walked quickly away."

At this point the sensitive reader begins to wonder whether Steinbeck has crossed the boundary from journalism into fiction. In a sense the question is moot because propaganda covers both sides of that border. If the nagging sense that Steinbeck made all of this up continues, the sensitive reader can at least tell himself he is not alone in his suspicions. Steinbeck's sons also felt that he made up the conversations in *Travels with Charley*. "Thom and I are convinced," wrote John Steinbeck IV, "that he never talked to any of those people in *Travels with Charley*. He just sat in his camper and wrote all that shit. He was too shy. He was really frightened of people who saw through him. He couldn't have handled that amount of interaction. So, the book is actually a great novel." (John Steinbeck IV and Nancy Steinbeck, *The Other Side of Eden: Life with John Steinbeck* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001, p. 151)

The redneck who got expelled from Steinbeck's RV was right, of course. New York Jews were coming to the South to stir up the Negroes. They had been coming ever since a group of New York Jews had created the NAACP, and they were going to come in even greater numbers. The summer of 1964 would be a high water mark of sorts in the Black Jewish Alliance, which would collapse in acrimony in 1967-8, when Harold Cruse wrote his expose of the Black Jewish alliance from the Negro perspective and when the Negroes expelled Jewish teachers from their schools in the Ocean-Hill Brownsville section of New York around the same time.

So the cracker got expelled from Steinbeck's RV for telling the truth. It is not surprising that someone who had dedicated his life to promoting the deceptions favored by those in power would feel this way about the truth. Steinbeck also probably felt this way because he owed his fame to the Jews, first the Hollywood Jews and then the New York Jews. "I don't think any writer has ever been luckier," says Gore Vidal. "Steinbeck was one of those rare novelists who actually had a happy relation to Hollywood." (Parini, p. 229).

And yet even when promoted by the most powerful people on the face of the earth, deception and propaganda have their limits. And these limitations become most apparent in time of war. It is said that the winners of wars write the histories. That is probably the case. But no amount of propaganda can disguise the realities of losing a war, especially the fact that it has been lost. Steinbeck had become a war propagandist during World War II. When he tried the same thing in Vietnam, he was forced to admit 1) that the war was wrong and 2) that America was losing it and 3) that his own reputation was at stake. Unable to admit any of those things, but at the same time unable to change the tide of events through deception, Steinbeck, whose health was failing anyway, took the easy way out and killed himself, rather than admit he had been wrong. Steinbeck's sons served as soldiers in Vietnam. According to John Steinbeck IV, Steinbeck "chose the overdose of morphine" over admitting that he, "the Conscience of America" had been wrong about the war. "He was broken from the Vietnam thing. He didn't want to be alive in a world where he wasn't right."

In his analysis of the corrupting effect which war has had on American culture, Robert Nisbet makes it clear that it was the intellectuals who created the Hell which America became. High on Nisbet's list of intellectual villains was George Creel, Woodrow Wilson's propaganda minister, and creator of the progenitor of all agencies of deception in America, the Committee for Public Information. Creel, whom Nisbet describes as "one of the most gifted architects of propaganda, of manufacture of public consciousness that has ever lived," created the "four minute men" whose "job was to infiltrate every public gathering of any kind with the objective of delivering four-minute speeches in celebration of the war." It was World War I and the propaganda which that war necessitated which led America down the road to where it finds itself today. Using the war as their excuse, Wilson and Creel prepared America for "the West's first experience with totalitarianism—political absolutism extended into every possible area of culture and society, education, religion, industry, the arts, local community and family included, with a kind of terror always waiting in the wings. . . ." Wilson "succeeded in infusing a whole generation of intellectuals with the sense of cause, of mission, in the moral sphere, to be accomplished only through the power of the national state he came close to worshipping." In order to succeed at war, America had to transform itself into the Leviathan that meant the end of "the spirit of localism, of grass roots and of pluralism that had characterized so much of American reform thought" until that time. Each succeeding war president took America further down the same path. Franklin Delano Roosevelt drew "upon experiences it had known in World War I in order to combat the Depression." America got its first taste of home-grown fascism at that time. It was also at that time and under the aegis of the war economy that "the marriage of university and government took place." During the Cold War which followed World War II, "the marriage between intellectuals and government became a firm tie. . . . The desire to be close to the seat of power . . . was as strong in the Rome of Augustus as in the Washington of Kennedy" (p. 172).

The descendants of the "public intellectuals" who created the mess that is America are still hard at work, trying to make an even greater mess out of the one the last generation bequeathed to them. Steinbeck ended up a high-classed prostitute; he turned to propaganda after he ruined his life and his wife's life when he ordered her to have an abortion. One of the consequences of his work is that writing and



prostitution (or academe and prostitution) have become practically synonymous terms. This, as Robert Nisbet tried to tell us in 1975, when America was going through its reaction to Vietnam, was one of the many lamentable consequences of creating a culture based on war.

August 2007, the time when Peter and I made our hajj to the mythic American West, marked the lull before the storm. In this instance that meant the propaganda barrage which was calculated to enthuse Americans, already disgusted with Iraq, with a new war against Iran.

If John Steinbeck was the equivalent of a high class prostitute when it comes to war propagandists, we now live in the age of the two dollar whore. I am referring to epigoni like Neoconservative Norman Podhoretz, whose book urging Americans into war with Iran was released on September 11, the sixth anniversary of the World Trade Tower collapse, and David Gelernter, a computer professor at Yale who aspires to the stained mantle of public intellectual. Both Podhoretz and Gelernter are high priests of the Jewish cult known as neoconservatism. Like all revolutionary Jews since the time of Simon bar Kokhbar, they advocate messianic politics, which is based on the claim that those who take up the sword can create heaven on earth. Just as Russia became the vehicle for world revolution when the Jews from the pale of the settlement rose up and toppled the czar, now America is the vehicle for creating the new Jewish version of heaven on earth. After years of proclaiming that Bible thumpers were the villains of American history, Jews like Gelernter have changed their tune. Jews like Leo Pfeffer, of the AJC, made careers out of driving Christianity out of public life. Secularism was good according to the Jews in the '60s. After years of driving religion out of the public square and public schools, the Jews (of the neocon variety at least) now want to reintroduce religion to shore up America's flagging support of the war in Iraq. Because America is now a vassal of Israel when it comes to foreign policy, the Jews have become chest-thumping patriots. "America" (the quotes are Gelernter's)

is one of the most beautiful religious concepts mankind has ever known. It is sublimely humane, but based on strong confidence in humanity's ability to make life better. "America" is an idea that results from focusing the Bible and Judeo-Christian faith like a spotlight's beam on the problems of this life (not the next) in the modern world, in a modern nation. (David Gelernter, *Americanism: the Fourth Great Western Religion* [New York: Doubleday, 2007], p. 2)

Gelernter knows enough about American history to know that the Puritans were Judaizers, although he never uses that term. Pretending that nothing happened in America from the time of the half-way covenant in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century until the present, Gelernter announces that "We American Puritans are God's new chosen people" (p. 65). We are not dealing with any pale civic religion here; no, we are dealing with full-blown idolatry. Caesar is once again God as he was in the other empire which ruled the world and then collapsed. America is not just a religious nation; America is a religion, characterized by "passionate belief in the community's closeness to God and its obligation to God and the whole world—Americans as a new chosen people, America as a new promised land—that is American Zionism" (p. 69).

In case you were wondering, Gelernter is quick to add that "the American Religion is a global religion," which means that we as Americans are every bit as much bound to spread "Liberty, Equality, and Democracy" from Iraq to Iran by force of arms—nuclear arms, if necessary—as the Christians were bound by Christ to preach the Gospel to all nations. "Americans," Gelernter informs us, "have a duty not merely to preach but to bring them [liberty, equality, democracy] to all mankind." Drawing on a view of American history that is stunning in its lack of depth and insight, Gelernter concludes that Puritans were fanatics, but they were good fanatics. Unlike Muslims, who are bad fanatics. Jews now like religious fanatics if they support wars in support of Israel.

Muslim fanatics murder men, women and children at random [unlike Israeli fanatics who take careful aim before they shoot children]. But the Puritans who settled the New World were fanatics of a different order. They came to America because they chose not to fight it out in England; they did not want to foment rebellion or cause bloodshed.

Gelernter is a depressingly common phenomenon lately. Gelertner is the New York (or New Haven) Jew who is the expert on just about everything. Unlike the rest of us, who have to back up their assertions, Jews get by on the ipse dixit alone. What they say must be true because they as a group are rich and powerful. As if that weren't enough, they have access to big New York publishing houses, like Doubleday, which published Gelernter's book. In his new-found role as "public intellectual," Gelernter, the computer geek, takes it upon himself to explain the real meaning of Christianity to the dumb goyim, especially the evangelical variety who have been following Rev. Hagee now that Rev. Falwell has gone on to his reward in the big Kibbutz in the sky. Gelernter's book is full of patronizing nods in the direction of Christians:

you built America and Americanism. In so doing you gave mankind one of the greatest gifts it

has ever received. Do not allow yourselves to be spiritually dispossessed in your own homes. This country will never have an established official religion; it will never abandon religious freedom. But neither should it be allowed to abandon its history or origins or lie about them.

Just in case the goyim get their hopes up and look for a return to Bible reading in public schools, Gelernter is there to let them down easy: "Christians are (rightly) prohibited to preach Christianity in the public schools; secularists should be prohibited to preach secularism too" (p. 12). But aside from that nod to the ghost of Leo Pfeffer, everything is going to be okay, as long as the goyim let professors like Gelernter tell them what their country and their religion really mean: "For all Christians facing the dauntingly powerful secularist culture of the modern United States," the great American theologian from the Shalem Institute in Jerusalem tells us, "be strong and of good courage."

Well, God Bless you too, Professor Gelernter!

We are then treated to the idiot's guide to American history, whose main principle is that the only good Christian is a war-mongering Judaiser. According to this algorithm, Woodrow Wilson "took America into the First World War and proclaimed Americanism a world religion, which implied chivalrous duties abroad and at home. He read the bible, prayed every day, and was shaped by his Presbyterian faith." It goes downhill from there:

Ronald Reagan, who announced that America must finally win the cold War, was a devout Protestant; his Americanism might have been even more devout. Reagan reminded America of John Winthrop's prediction about a shining city on a hill. George W. Bush is a chivalrous American who believes in liberty, equality and democracy not just for France and Denmark but for Arab nations where the residents have brown skin and strange ways. Our duty is to provide them too with liberty, equality, and democracy, says Bush.

By now it should be clear that Jewish propagandists for war can say anything no matter how preposterous and get away with it, as when Gelernter tells us that Puritans "invented a primitive and serviceable type of democracy," or when he calls Jonathan Edwards a Puritan, or when he claims that "at independence in 1776 roughly three-quarters of American citizens were Puritan" [Like Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin?] or when he confuses the concepts of original sin and predestination, as in the following passage: "The doctrine of predestination preached by John Calvin was central to Puritanism. It may be one aspect of Puritanism that is hardest for moderns to sympathize with. Puritans reasoned that because of Adam's sin and the fall of man, men were born sinful, able to control their behavior but not their thoughts," Or when he says "Queen Elizabeth tolerated the Puritans" even though they didn't exist then.

Add to that Gelernter's relentless use of the the *ipse dixit* -- "Jamestown," we are told, "had a Puritan flavor" -- and comically bad prose, as in Gelernter's view of World War I: "In six week, said the brisk, heel-clicking German generals in their spike-decorated clown hats, France's goose will be cooked," and you begin to long for the good old days, when war propaganda was written by high class prostitutes like John Steinbeck.

Either way, intellectuals created the Hell that is now known as America. Professor Joans has nothing but good things to say about the sexual decadence of biker culture. As a feminist she tries to look the other way, when she is a witness to what the nonbiking world would refer to as rape, including the rape of her favorite biker chick: "We pass Miss White Hair . . . her hair's still in its neat brad but she has dark smudges around her eyes and a swollen mouth."

### **Taste for Deviance**

And yet even Professor Joans' taste for deviance has its limits. When she writes about her descent into the "The Pit," the locale of the bacchanal at the Redwood Run in California, she ends up borrowing imagery from Dante: "As we walk I stare down into the pit and realize that I could be looking into the ninth circle."

The same thought occurs to me at dusk on the third day of our journey, when Peter and I descended the mountain of fire and entered Missoula, Montana. There is a sign on the highway that announces the Missoula Testicle Festival, a sure sign that Missoula is a university town. Steering through the smoke from the forest fires while talking on his cell phone, Peter has arranged a meeting with his nephew, an undergraduate history major at the University of Montana. The young man turns out to be a typical product of University culture. Both of his parents were professionals (his father, now deceased, was a professor; his mother a counselor); he dresses like Gap's vision of the working class, complete with grease-stained jeans. He has also just purchased a pick-up truck which runs on vegetable oil. When I ask

why he just doesn't get around town on his bicycle, he says that he needs the truck for cross-country trips, since he refuses to fly.

Peter steers the RV to the lowest point in Missoula, a parking lot under a bridge next to the river. A number of semis are already there with their engines running; they belong to the road crew for a Lyle Lovett concert on the other side of the bridge. The initial arrangement was that we would go for a swim in the river, but that deal did not go down, and instead we ended up at a Mexican restaurant when Peter's nephew wondered aloud what to do for a course of directed readings on the South.

"How about something on the Black-Jewish alliance?" I suggested. When it became clear that Peter's nephew didn't have a clue about the Black-Jewish alliance, I launched into a mini-lecture which began with the founding of the NAACP, covered the Leo Frank trial and the trial of the Scottsboro boys, and ended up with the civil rights movement and the Black Panthers. I was in the middle of explaining the position of two to the seminal texts—Murray Friedman's *What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* and Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*—when a man leaned over from the next table and said, "Would you mind not talking about this topic? My friend here is Jewish."

Usually, I am dumbfounded at moments like this, but this time I replied, "You can tell we're in a university town. The thought police are out in force." I then told him to mind his own damned business and not eavesdrop on our conversation and continued with what I was saying. I hadn't read *Travels with Charley* at that point in my life, but now I realize that everyone who aspires to the things of the intellect has now become a cracker-barrel commissar like John Steinbeck, expelling anyone who disagrees with social engineering out of the synagogue of accepted opinions.

Peter and I entered Missoula in need of a meal, a place to wash up in preparation for the wedding the next day, and a place to park the RV for the night. In the end Peter's nephew, in spite of what he promised us over the phone, came through with nothing. Peter's nephew, like all human beings created in the image of God, has an obligation to treat strangers with kindness. His obligation to flesh and blood is even greater. In the end, I ended up paying for the meal, and all his uncle got was an airy good-bye because the nephew had friends to meet.

And so Peter and I returned to the parking lot under the bridge. The semis were still there with their motors running, but it was much darker than when we left. It was also now full of people streaming out of the Lyle Lovett concert. Lyle was on his way to Sturgis to perform at the Buffalo Chip campground, and the women who had listened to him sing were all intoxicated now, literally, figuratively, whatever.

"I love your hair," said a woman who was obviously drunk. She was fortunate in not being alone and doubly fortunate because the people she was with were not as drunk as she was. When the car she was in pulled away, another woman appeared. This one is also drunk. I ask her if she knows when the semis are going to pull out, since sleeping within three feet of a roaring diesel engine seems out of the question. She doesn't know, but offers to let me park the RV in her driveway. She is not as drunk as the first woman. If I asked her, she would probably agree to let me (us?) use her shower, but somehow it didn't seem like a good way to prepare for the wedding in the morning. And so with the semis still roaring and the women still intoxicated and wandering around in the dark, we pull out of the parking lot by the river in Missoula and move on to the climax of our own little journey into the heart of darkness.

## **The Last Circle**

We pull into the last circle in the hell which America's social engineers have planned for all of us; we spend the night in a Wal-Mart parking lot. In many ways, this is only fitting because Wal-Mart is the culmination of the American dream in one sense, and RV its culmination in another. We are living in a home on wheels, the symbol of America's deracination. And our home on wheels is now within walking distance of the greatest emporium of cheap junk the world has ever known. What more could an American ask for?

As I walk, toothbrush in hand, across the parking lot toward the Wal-Mart men's room, I notice that we are not alone. There must be at least 20 RVs like our own all nestled together in the corner of a huge parking lot across an asphalt lake from the institution dedicated to enslaving us by catering to our disordered desires. It is late when we arrive, so they are all shut up and dark, but I'm sure had we arrived earlier, we could have found a ready-made community there on that parking lot. At least we would know that we were not alone, which is, of course, what occurred to Dante, when he entered Hell. "I had not thought that death had undone so many."

The men's room at Wal-Mart was clean; it was also well-lighted, and unlike the café where Hemingway's old man sat, there was no waiter there waiting impatiently to go home. The water from their water fountain was cool and refreshing. I could have drunk as much as I wanted; it didn't cost me anything. I could have also stayed there all night if I had wished, shuffling up and down aisle after aisle over what were literally acres of junk from China. What more could an American want?

As one answer to that question, I recommend a recent film, *The Shooter*, starring Mark Walberg. It's now

out on DVD; you can probably buy it at Wal-Mart. In that film, Wahlberg plays a sniper who has been betrayed by his government. He retires from the military only to be lured back to prevent an assassination attempt against the president. When that turns out to be a set up for which he is to take the fall, the Wahlberg character declares war on his own government. We have become used to this sort of film from Dirty Harry to Rambo, but the rage level in *The Shooter* is, as they say in Hollywood, over the top. At the end of his own journey into the Heart of Darkness, the Wahlberg character ends up confronting the politician, played by someone who looks like Pat Robertson, who embodies all of the evil of the system. "I'm an American Senator," he says, and the Wahlberg character responds by say, "I know" as he shoots him down in cold blood.

*The Shooter* is full of rage at what America has become. *The Shooter* is also a Hollywood film, which means that the rage is fanned to a white-hot flame and then directed at a phantom target. Eventually, the military is going to discover who led us into the war in Iraq. It was not phantom Senators; it was AIPAC and Neocon Jews like Norman Podhoretz and David Gelernter. It is they who are leading the charge (from the safe confines of retirement and academe respectively) into Iran. Eventually that story is going to get out, and when it does, the Jewish supporters of our wars in the middle east, who take consolation in the fact that they have shut down public demonstrations of the sort that plagued the nation during the Vietnam War, might want to ponder the suggestion, mooted in this film, that the reaction this time may come as mutiny in the military. How about this as a plot line for *Shooter II*? Mark Wahlberg goes gunning for Paul Wolfowitz.

Daniel Smith, as I said, is in Iraq now, trying out the geographical cure for the wound which abortion and the culture of death inflicted on him. Unlike David Gelernter and the other neocon chickenhawk warmongers, Daniel Smith has served in the military, defending a country which he now realizes has ruined his life. Before he left for the middle east he left a manuscript behind which can serve as a Catholic counterpoint to the Jewish warmongering of David Gelernter and Norman Podhoretz. Smith lacks their access to the media, but his conclusions are worth pondering nonetheless, if for no other reason that there are more Catholics in America than Jews, and certainly more in the military.

Unlike Gelernter, who concludes that America is a religion, Smith concludes that the United States lost its legitimacy the moment it legalized abortion and set up the logic that led to him killing his own child. "There can be found no stronger evidence as to the morally illegitimate nature of the Government of the United States," this soldier writes, "than the Supreme Court holdings that establish "rights" of people, especially women, to contraception and abort. . . . With the Griswold and the Roe decisions, the Court established that the purpose, the nature, of the United States is to protect peoples ability to live isolated, alone, and without God."

The unspoken assumption behind David Gelernter's book is that the dumb goyim will believe anything as long as some Jewish intellectual, backed by the New York publishing industry, says it. Smith's unpublished manuscript, coming as it does from someone in the military, indicates that this is not the case. In fact, it indicates that the "The Roman catholic Faith is fundamentally at odds with the American Economic System, or with capitalism, as that system has come to be known and accepted. . . . An economic system that allows vast disparities of wealth . . . is morally illegitimate."

The fact that Smith's manuscript is unpublished makes it even more significant. Far from being ready to convert to Americanism, Gelernter's "fourth great western religion," this Catholic soldier has concluded that

America . . . was flawed from the beginning and those flaws have worsened over time. America has always been . . . a construct for the control of the masses by a relatively few people at the top of the cultural, social and economic heap." Far from being a religion that brings freedom to the rest of the world, "America, as an Empire, is an engine for the destruction of lives and the damnation of souls at home and around the world."

One wonders what kind of conversations Daniel Smith is having with his fellow soldiers in Iraq. Are they discussing Americanism, freedom or how to find the weapons of mass destruction? If it becomes common knowledge over there that it was the neoconservatives who put American soldiers into that meatgrinder, David Gelernter has reason for concern. He probably won't want to be standing next to a window when *Shooter II* arrives at the multiplex.

## **Chapter 4: Saturday, August 4**

Like Steinbeck, Peter and I drove out of Montana "across the upraised thumb of Idaho and through real mountains that climbed straight up, tufted with pines and deep-dusted with snow." Like Steinbeck, 47

years ago, Peter and I arrived in Spokane, but unlike the Conscience of America, we are not just passing through; we arrive for a wedding. If the play ends with a wedding, I always tell my children, it has to be a comedy, no matter how harrowing the story was before that. And so this narrative must be a comedy, not a divine word.

Terry O'Riordain, the groom, was born in America, but he is not an American. He and the rest of his family moved back to Ireland when they realized that the struggle for an economic niche in New York wasn't worth the trouble anymore. In this he is like virtually every other Irishman in New York. They have all gone back to Ireland. You could shoot a cannon down any street in Queens now and not hit an Irishman.

Terry did come back to America, but not in the way that Irishmen have come before. He came back to teach Irish to the heathen, the Irish diaspora cut off from their roots and living in God-forsaken places like Montana and Indiana. Terry taught Irish at Notre Dame, home of the Fighting Irish. His ultimate goal was to create an Irish studies program, which he succeeded in doing at the University of Montana at Missoula, a place even more God-forsaken than Notre Dame. Terry is a good example of the return of the repressed. At the very moment that David Gelernter and the New York Jews are asking us all to bow down in front of the Idol they have called America, Terry, like some latter day St. Brendan, is finding converts to the ancient Irish brand of ethnic Catholicism in the belly of the beast, the university at Missoula. It's hard to say which alternative David Gelernter would find more repugnant: the average soldier figuring out that Neocons like he are responsible for sending him to Iraq or Terry O'Riordain, the return of the ethnic repressed, gaining a foothold in academe.

Terry has rented the Masonic temple for his reception, primarily because it across the street from the cathedral. Peter and I have time. We check out the hall. I launch into a lecture on the pillars, which are hopelessly eclectic but primarily Corinthian. A woman selling drinks asks me if I am a professor. "Why," I ask, "do I look effeminate? Should I have taken part in the testicle festival in Missoula?"

We meet three bikers on the street outside the church. One is a handsome middle-aged Irish woman from Canada with red hair and freckles and black leather chaps and heavy motorcycle boots. She is on her way to Sturgis.

When Peter and I cross the street to enter the church, I am struck by the crowd standing in front of the steps. No one is wearing any kind of uniform, as far as I can tell. It's not like the biker rally in Sturgis, where everyone is dressed the same. And yet there is this similarity, this coherence nonetheless, when finally it dawns on me. They're all Irish. Terry's wedding is a distinctly ethnic affair. His family has come from Ireland to help him celebrate, and the Irish boyos have come with them. One of the boyos has become a priest, and as the celebrant of the Mass he launches into a blistering attack on the culture of death, from which all of us, including the groom, have narrowly escaped with our lives. At this point it becomes obvious that there is nothing incompatible about ethnos and Christ. Christ after all told his disciples to go out and baptize all nations. You can baptize a nation, but you can't baptize a false religion or an idol, like the "fourth great Western Religion" Jews like David Gelernter are now promoting. All you can do with an idol is fall down and worship it or smash it, as St. Patrick smashed the altars and idols of the Druids when he claimed Ireland for the faith.

If there is such a thing as redemption, its not what this culture thinks it is. The American Jews turned the Messiah into Superman, a comic book hero. American culture in years gone by set up redemption centers, where you could transform green stamps magically into things like lamps and vacuum cleaners. No matter what else it is, redemption is not a time machine. You can't bring the child you killed back to life, but as long as you're alive, you can link up with God's plan for your life as long as you are willing to do it on God's terms and not your own. Which is probably why John Steinbeck committed suicide and why the people who gave their abortion testimonies in *Redeeming a Father's Heart* did not. Like Peter, who stayed up all night on speed at the family cabin, Clifford and Hepzibah Pyncheon found redemption by calling on the name of the Lord: "Oh, God—Our Father—" they cried when they realized no railroad (or RV or motorcycle) could travel fast enough or far enough to allow them to escape from their sins, "Are we not thy children? Have mercy on us!"

## **Chapter 5: Sunday, August 5**

On Sunday morning after Mass, Peter and I wander down to the magnificent waterfall which lies at the center of Spokane, Washington. Except that on this morning the falls are far from magnificent. In fact, there are no falls this morning. Someone has inexplicably turned the river off, and so all we can contemplate is a magnificent rock pool full of calm water, and the fact that the stairs leading down to that pool have cut us off from any real access to the water. This strikes me as symbolic of America. Magnificent natural resources spoiled by an overlay of culture that isolates man from nature and vice versa. This leads me to expound Mike Jones's law of rivers. In general I would never swim in a river in Africa. In general, I would have no hesitation about swimming in a river in Europe, and have done so

many times. In America, however, I have no clear ideas one way or the other.

The river inspires other thoughts in Peter's mind. Looking at the bridge crossing the river below the (now nonexistent) falls, Peter is reminded of his deceased uncle, the only man who was brave enough to jump off the train trestle into the river in the Wisconsin Dells. Peter's uncle was a legend in the Dells, and Peter keeps his memory alive to this day, but his daredevil uncle got caught up America's never-ending cycle of wars. He died while training as a World War II fighter pilot in the Florida Everglades. It's one more sad instance of the same old story. America's potential wrecked by war. After the Civil War, there were 50,000 widows and almost as many masterless farms in New England, and that was the situation among the victors. The fact that life goes on obliterates in our minds the cost of America's ongoing folly and any idea of what could have been. The survivors get to articulate a vision, but one constrained by the exigencies of the raw materials of history at hand. And so we are left with Peter, the oxymoronic symbol of America, the rootless deliverer of RVs who in some sense never left the Wisconsin Dells.

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### **Author's Biographical Note**

E. Michael Jones, Ph.D., the editor of [Culture Wars](#) magazine, is the author of more than a dozen books.

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